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One Throne.

Can you hear the distant thunder?

Available April 1997

AEG

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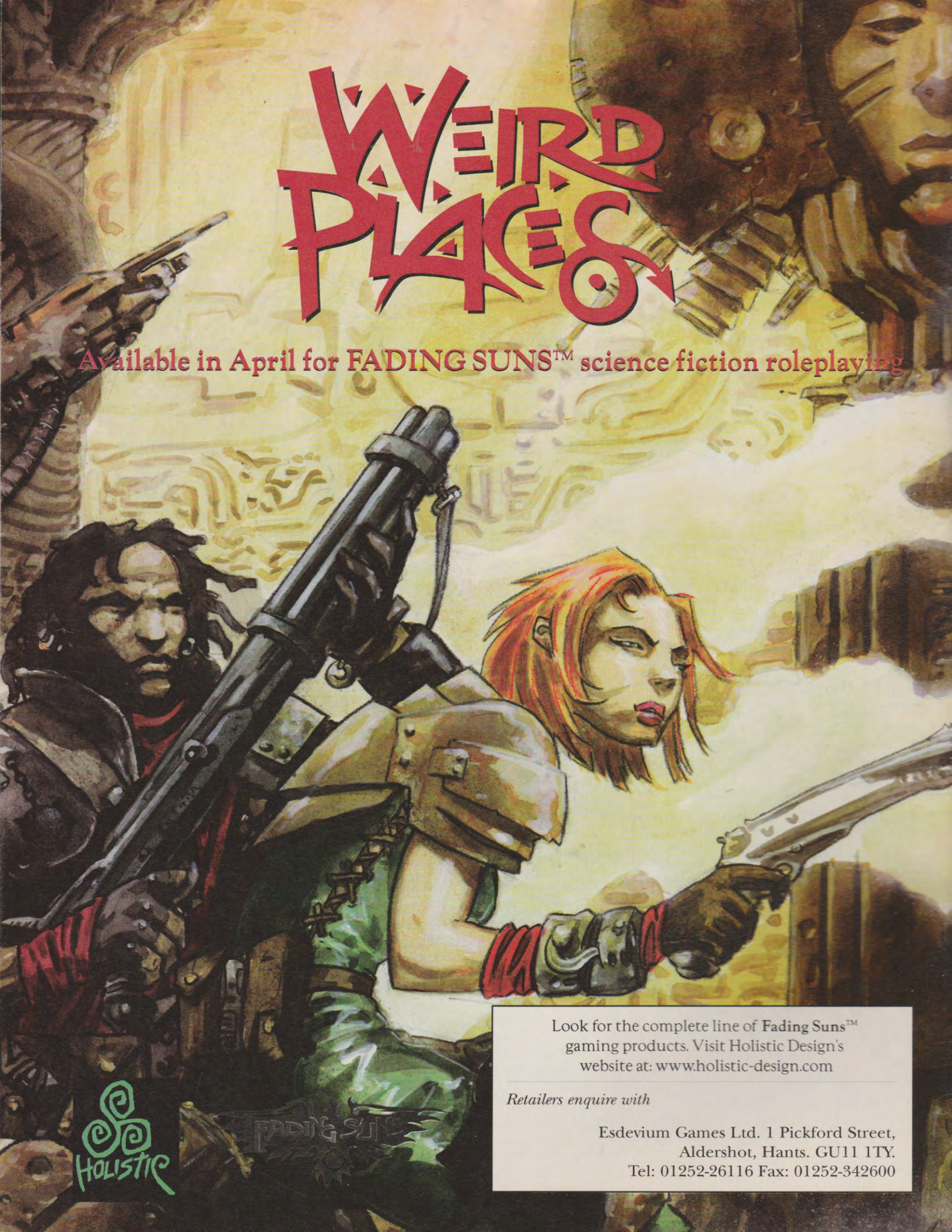

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Alien Invasion

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They've got bigger guns than us or better disguises. Typical.

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This issue would have been impossible without... **black coffee, cigarettes**
This issue would have been a lot easier without... **the 'flu**

Love to hate

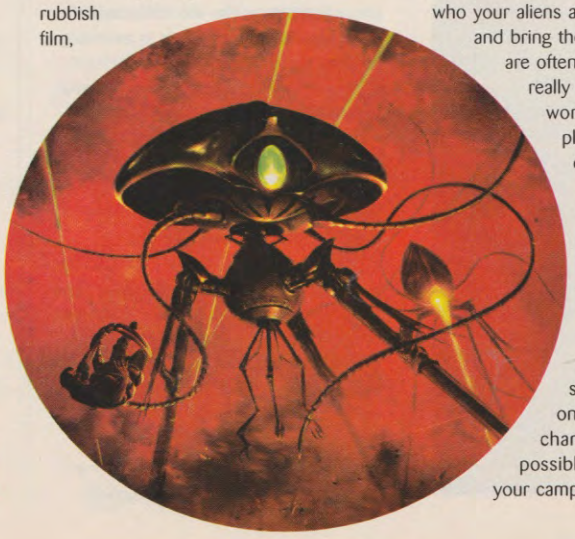
Aliens. They crush us with their military might or they infiltrate sneakily. Damn them.

In science fiction xenophobia isn't the ugly word it is when referring to humanity's own bloody history of race relations. Science fiction has real aliens. They're not people being demonised, they're demons – or demon-like – and they're every bit as nasty as they're made out to be. They want to kill us all and take over the world, goddammit! Wanting them to die isn't bad, it's unthinking survival instinct. And unthinking whooping at *Independence Day* in the cinema.

Not that I'm attacking *Independence Day*. I cheered with everyone else. But I'm sure that, special effects and self-knowing clichés aside, part of the reason that we're willing to swallow this cheesy morsel of modern cinema is the fact that it deals in simple xenophobia. Whether you cheer inwardly or outwardly, you can't not support the home team.

It's the same in the *War of the Worlds*. Not the rubbish film, but the vinyl version by Jeff Lynn with Richard Burton narrating. When the Martians stride into the Thames, you're not a passive listener. You're desperately gunning for the ironclad, Thunderchild, as she turns with a deafening roar and whoosh of spray and charges full steam ahead. Go get 'em, Thunderchild, you're thinking, swallowing that lump in your throat and knowing all the while that she's going to get turned to slag and cinders.

"You're not a passive bystander. You're gunning for the ironclad, Thunderchild, as she turns with a deafening roar and whoosh of spray, and charges..."



Other alien invasion films, whatever the aliens' modus operandi, evoke a similar gut response. This makes life easy for film directors. They don't have to worry about plot. It's us versus them in a fight to the finish. Bring on the aliens – and even a budget that only runs to a gorilla suit and a deep sea diver's helmet for the alien will suffice... almost – and the story will look after itself.

What's this got to do with games? For director, read referee. For plot, decide who your aliens are and what they want and bring them on. Alien invasions are often clichéd, but it doesn't really matter. The structure works. It unifies the players and gives them a clear agenda. Every blow against the aliens is a blow for liberty, decency and humanity (tum-tum-ti-tum, tum ti-tum ti-tum ti-tum...).

It's true that an alien campaign isn't something to embark on lightly because it will change your world, possibly irrevocably. But if your campaign is starting to look old and stale, it's a great way of breathing some life into it. You can clean the slate while you're at it.

Alien invasions don't have to take place in the 1890s or the 1990s. For example, you could easily do a fantasy spin on The *Invasion of the Bodysnatchers* using doppelgangers for the aliens. More on this in John Tynes's article starting on page 20.

If you do want to do the whole HG Wells thing, with Martian tripods and heat rays in Victorian England, we've got the ideal game for you. Marcus Rowland's *Forgotten Futures* comes free on the front of this issue. Let the red weed run riot.

The day we were putting this magazine to press we heard that Wizards of the Coast had bought TSR. There will be doom-mongers who reckon this means the end of roleplaying as we know it. We're not among them. In the **arcane** office, there was an audible sigh of relief. Wizards buying TSR isn't the death of roleplaying, it's more like the *survival* of the whole roleplaying industry *as an industry*. Good news!

Dan Joyce, Editor

NEWS

News from around the roleplaying industry brought to you by **arcane**.

STOP PRESS!

• Wizards of the Coast buy TSR! The deal should be signed and sealed by the time you read this.

CHAMPIONS COMPO

• We've got ten copies to give away and you can win one in our competition on page 13.

ZERO

COMING SOON

The world of Nexus comes to life in a new RPG...

British science fiction artist Steve Stone has teamed up with veteran designer Lester Smith to produce the next game system from industry newcomer Archangel Entertainment.

The game, *Zero,* is set in the twisted future world of Nexus, itself inspired by Stone's distinctive Nexus DNA artwork which has appeared in numerous magazines over the past few years. Visitors to last year's Euro GenCon may well have seen the impressive selection of his work that was on display there near the main gaming hall.

Details of the game itself are sketchy at the moment. The future world of Nexus seems to operate as a 'hive mind', called the Equanimity. The minds of all the inhabitants function as a whole, working to keep the world alive. As long as everyone works together, everyone is happy, and as long as no-one asks questions, they are safe. Change is unheard of, and individuality is crushed in the cause of the 'greater good'. But not everyone is convinced that the Equanimity is the benign system it appears to be.

Some exceptional individuals have doubts about the system they are part of; doubts that hold great danger, but also the possibility of change.

Players in Zero take on the roles of these 'aberrant' individuals and must struggle against the might of an entire culture to discover the truth.

What is certain, however, is that *Zero* is set to be one of the most visually stunning roleplaying games ever. The combination of Steve Stone's artwork and imagination with the skills and experience of Lester Smith (whose past credits include *Dark Conspiracy, Dragon Dice,* and *Traveller*) also holds a great deal of promise for the game itself.

Zero is due to be released by Archangel Entertainment in June, and we'll bring you more news about the game soon. In the meantime, turn to page 71 to see what we thought of *Extreme Vengeance,* Archangel Entertainment's first game.

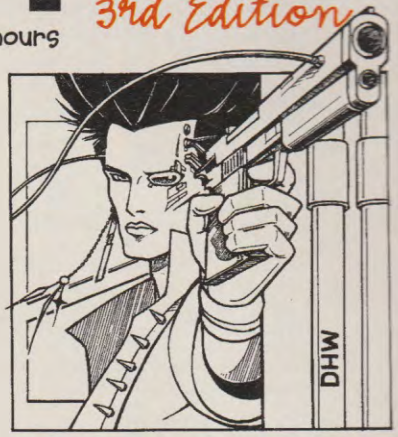
Cyberpunk

3rd Edition

R Talsorian confirms the rumours

R Talsorian Games, developer and publisher of *Cyberpunk 2020,* has confirmed rumours of a new edition of the game, as reported in arcane last year. A third edition of the company's flagship roleplaying game is due out in September this year.

Details are scarce but the new edition will use the *Fuzion* system rules jointly developed by R Talsorian and Hero Games, versions of which have already appeared in the *Bubblegum Crisis* RPG (arcane 14) and *Champions: The New Millennium* (this issue). There will be a new Netrunning system that will be faster, simpler to use and reflecting that everyone uses the Net in some way. The new edition will also advance the timeline of the *Cyberpunk* world by another decade and will deal with changes brought about by the Fourth Corporate War currently detailed in the *Firestorm* supplements.



R Talsorian say the future will be a "weirder than you're used to", with the emphasis on the post-modern rather than post-apocalyptic, reflecting changes in the genre since the original version of the game.

Wizards of the Coast

CCG giant acquires the oldest and largest RPG company

Just as this issue of arcane went to press, Wizards of the Coast and TSR announced the signing of a letter of intent for Wizards to buy the roleplaying giant.

TSR has appeared to be in financial trouble since Christmas, with no new releases appearing since the start of this year. Despite the wide variety of rumours flying about, though, the company had declined to comment on the situation.

Fuzion hits the WWW

FUZION LABS

After several delays, the Fuzion Group (R Talsorian Games and Hero Games) has released the current revision of the game system on the World Wide Web.

The complete system is available for free download, either as an HTML document, or in Adobe Acrobat format, preserving the design, layout, and formatting. The version is that used in *Champions: The New Millennium* (see reviews this issue), and has been fine-tuned since the its first appearance in *Bubblegum Crisis* (**arcane** 13).

As well as being the standard for all future releases from R Talsorian and Hero Games, Fuzion is also available to other companies under licence.

Forthcoming games to use the system include *Sengoku* and *Usagi* due soon from Gold Rush Games.

Interested gamers should point their browsers at: `http://www.sabram.com/rtalsoriangames/site/fuzion/index.html`

Card Ga

Five Rings Publishing lays its new cards on the table

Five Rings Publishing, producer of the *Legend of the Five Rings* CCG and the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* collectable dice game, has announced three new CCGs to be released this year.

The first, based on *Deadlands* from Pinnacle Entertainment (**arcane** 13), is set in a warped Old West where magic has returned and dark creatures stalk the night. The game, currently called *Doomtown,* will be set in the fictional town of Gehenna in the earthquake-shattered remains of the California Maze. Players compete for control of the mysterious Ghost Rock, a newly discovered power source that's both incredibly versatile and long-lasting. Development will be by AEG, with Five Rings handling production, marketing and distribution.

Secondly, Five Rings will handle the production, marketing and distribution of *Dune: Eye of the Storm,* a CCG based on the Dino De Laurentis film of Frank

Babylon Project UK

Babylon 5 RPG in Europe

Chameleon Eclectic and Wireframe Productions, producers of the *Babylon 5*-inspired RPG, *The Babylon Project*, have announced a new licensing deal that will see the game released in Europe after all.

The companies had been unable to distribute the game in the UK and Europe due to previous commitments by Warner Bros, the *Babylon 5* copyright holders. Now, Titan Books will release the game in the UK this June.

As far as Chameleon and Wireframe understand, the book will be largely unaltered for European release. Titan Books should also be releasing some, or even all, of the planned line of supplements.

to buy TSR

Now Wizards of the Coast, publisher of the *Magic: The Gathering* collectable card game, is to acquire TSR, with the deal to be completed in May.

So far no other details are available. Look out for the full story in the next issue of arcane, on sale Friday 23 May.

ne Frenzy

COMING SOON

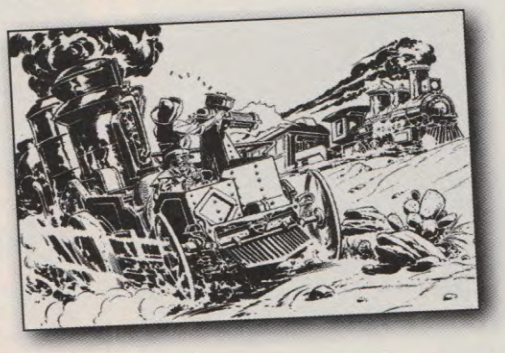
Herbert's classic science fiction novel, developed by Last Unicorn Games. Many images will be familiar to fans and the game also features new characters, locations, and equipment inspired by both film and novel. All artwork will be new, with no stills from the movie.

Finally, good news for *Rage*, the CCG based on *Werewolf: The Apocalypse* shelved by White Wolf earlier this year; Five Rings has complete rights to develop, produce, market, and distribute the game.

Ryan S Dancy, vice president of product development, also confirmed that Luke Peterschmidt, previously head of gaming products for Friedlander Publishing, is the new Rage developer.

Deadlands heats up

Two new books and a whole new game on the way...



Pinnacle Entertainment has announced a new game set in the Weird West of its *Deadlands* roleplaying system, as well as two books for the RPG.

The new game will be a miniatures system called *The Great Rail Wars*, based on the race to build a transcontinental railway line from the wealthy East Coast of the USA to the City of Lost Angels in the California Maze, the richest source of the fantastic fuel known as Ghost Rock. Six powerful Rail Barons are involved, each being intimately aware that the winner will gain untold riches, while the losers will have all but bankrupted themselves in the effort.

In such a high stakes contest, it was inevitable that things would start to get out of hand. Each Rail Baron hired a veritable army of gunslingers, scouts, and desperadoes to protect their interests while making sure that the others have the odd 'accident'. The violence quickly began to escalate, and the stage is set for gamers to pit their forces against each other.

Pinnacle is promising that not only will *The Great Rail Wars* have the same twisted atmosphere as the *Deadlands* RPG, but that it will also be a unique game in its own right.

The rules will emphasise the economic basis of the conflicts, leading to scenarios where the dollar sign is more important than military or strategic concerns. The game will be designed for battles with more than two sides - there are six Barons involved, after all - and will feature an initiative system designed to avoid having any player sitting around waiting for their turn. Throw in fast and furious mechanics that avoid the need for complex tables, and Pinnacle could be on to a winner. As well as the basic boxed set, a range of supplements and figures is also planned.

The two new books for *Deadlands* will be the first major supplements for the game. First comes *The Quick & the Dead*, a deluxe hardbound book that expands on the setting of the Weird West, with more information on the important people, places and 'things' of the *Deadlands* world, as well as including 10 new archetypes for players to choose from.

Following hot on its heels will be the long-awaited *Book o' the Dead*, a 128 page sourcebook covering the undead of the Weird West in complete detail. As well as new powers and an exhaustive look at undead characters in general there will also be new rules allowing players to create undead characters from scratch.

The Great Rail Wars will be released by Pinnacle Entertainment in July. There'll be a full review of *The Quick & the Dead* in the next issue of **arcane**, and *The Book o' the Dead* is scheduled to arrive at this station in time for issue 21.

COMING SOON

And besides...

Martial Arts Manga Mayhem

The latest new release from Manga Video is *Shadow Skill*, a full-length Japanese anime featuring more bonkers fight scenes and strange plots.

Set in a war-torn world where a small group of heroes stand alone against the forces of darkness and evil, *Shadow Skill* tells the story of 14-year old Gau and his struggle to master his martial arts training. In order to triumph, Gau must face not only his own sister but also the mysterious Scarface, and unlock the secrets of the Shadow Skill.

Anyone looking for some cool new moves to throw at their players should check it out.

High Tech and Low Life

FASA is to release a collection of the best art from its popular *Shadowrun* roleplaying game, first released in 1989.

Since then there have been numerous supplements and sourcebooks for the system,, together with a second edition of the main rules, many of which have featured superb work from a wide range of artists.

High Tech and Low Life - The Art of Shadowrun collects together the best of this, featuring both black and white and colour illustrations from highly respected artists including Jim Nelson, Tom Baxa, Jeff Laubenstein, Brom, Rick Berry and others.

Corsair Publishing

Another new gaming company has arrived in the roleplaying industry.

Corsair Publishing is based in Wisconsin and is the brainchild of Jon Leitheusser, whose previous experience includes work for Capital City Distribution and Diamond Comic Distributors. The company will also involve Phil Prange, an experienced gamer with a background in finance.

What makes Corsair interesting is the company's creator-driven philosophy, an idea common in the literary industry and recently adopted by many comics publishers.

Game designers working with Corsair will have great creative freedom and, more importantly, will retain the rights to their work.

"I feel when the creators are given creative freedom they produce their best work," said Leitheusser. "I think creators drive the games, so it's important to treat them fairly."

The first release from Corsair will be *Companions of the Road*, from Marc 'Traveller' Miller, due in August.

We'll give you more news in future issues of arcane..

Magic Grand Prix

Top players jostled for Pro Tour positions in Amsterdam. John Milner reports.

The Grand Prix was two day event hosted by Wizards of the Coast, Belgium, on 22nd and 23rd March. The first day was a Swiss style tournament with the top 64 players from day one progressing to day two. It was a strange event in that it was based on the 1st November 1996 deck construction rules. Additionally, a 'bye' system meant that highly ranked players automatically received a number of wins.

Notable UK players who were present included Graham Thomson (World No. 1), Ollie Schneider and Jason Nicoll. The Scottish team had turned out traditionally dressed in kilts.

There were approximately 30 staff running the tournament and 340 players. Problems with the new computer system meant that instead of starting the first round at 10:30am as advertised, they didn't start until noon. More system problems curtailed eight rounds of Swiss to seven.

There were a few notable events during the day. Graham Thomson, having an automatic invite to Paris and five hours before his first match, decided to compete for the best drinker competition and had consumed several litres of lager before his first match. This lead to him receiving a notification of impending warning for being drunk (he seemed quite pleased with this). Jason Nicoll had to wait until five o'clock before his first match, and whilst he was pleased with the three wins he was less than happy with the wait.

The second day saw the re-introduction of the computer system. With a smaller number of players it was felt that it could cope, which it did. The main event ran smoothly with no major disagreements until the final round of the Swiss element, when one player was disqualified for taking a card (Necropotence) out of his opponent's deck.

Later in the semi-finals, there was a 1 - 1 draw with only 30 second left to play the final game. The judges ruled that this game would be played, and the win would go to the first player to inflict damage. The match was won when David Nott drew a Mishra's Factory in his opening hand, and his opponent was unable to respond.

After two days of intense competition I would have liked to deliver an exciting and detailed final report. However, Emanuel Vernay and David Nott had previously agreed to share 1st and 2nd prize and only played one game for the honour. Emanuel won in 10 minutes flat.

Who said red was boring?

Emanuel Vernay's Winning Deck

2 Thawing Glaciers
1 Strip Mine
15 Mountain
4 Mishra's Factory
1 Balduvian Trading Post
4 Lightning Bolt
4 Incinerate
1 Kaevek's Torch
1 Earthquake
1 Disintegrate
2 Hammer of Bogarden
1 Pyrokinesis
4 Pillage
1 Primitive Justice
4 Fire Diamond
4 Uthden Troll
4 Wildfire Emissary
3 Gorilla Shaman
4 Balduvian Horde

Sideboard

3 Ankh of Mishra
1 Primitive Justice
3 Disintegrate
1 Pyrokinesis
1 Gorilla Shaman
4 Anarchy
2 Shatter

Out for the Count

Hammer horror films return from beyond the grave.

Three decades after they wrestled with stakes and crucifixes in the cinema, Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing are set to return, this time on the small screen. Warner Brothers are re-issuing the horror films of British company Hammer Films under their Terror Vision label. Out now are Dracula, The Curse of Frankenstein, and The Mummy.

Whether you see them as a classics of the genre or slightly kitsch is a matter of taste. It's true that the Hammer films aren't too horrific - Dracula and Frankenstein are 15 certificates, while The Mummy is a PG - but they're good stories all the same. Dracula, at least, is closer to the source material than the overblown modern adaptation from Francis Ford Coppola. The Curse of Frankeinstein lacks the faithfulness to Shelly's novel of Kenneth Brannagh's version, but doesn't actually suffer too badly in comparison.

The three Terror Vision videos are available now from all good video shops. And probably some bad ones.

Games on the box

You could get on telly by playing games.

Passionate games-players are wanted by a London film company to take part in a new television series about leisure. Ricochet Films want to hear from anyone who is crazy about games – anything from bridge or Subbuteo to, more importantly, Magic and roleplaying games. If you're interested, either phone 0171 251 6966 or write to: Ricochet Films, 138-140 Old Street, London EC1V 9BJ. Alternatively, you can e-mail them at mail@ricochet.co.uk.

EMAILE's Pox a Month
3rd May
Duelists' Convocation sanctioned *Magic* tourney at Static Games, Argyle Market, 28 Argyle Street, Glasgow from10.30am-5pm (doors open at 10am). Classic Restricted. Swiss system. 32 players. £3. Contact: Stuart Gosden, EMAILE, 7/4 Magdalene Gardens, Edinburgh, Lothian EH15 3DG **0131 467 4540**

Barcelona Grand Prix
3rd-4th May
DC sanctioned *Magic* tourney from which the best eight qualify for the New York Pro-Tour (see below for more info). **00 34 1 96 35 65**

Polycon
May 10th
In aid of Premrose: The Neo-Natal Support Group at Addenbrookes Hospital. 9am-8.30pm
AD&D Open, with a ticket to European GenCon 1997 as 1st pirze, *Dragon Dice, Magic, CoC, Charioteer Cahmpionships (?), Vampire LRP* + all the rest. Cambridge Regional College, King Hedges Road, Cambridge CB4 2QT
"www.compulink.co.uk/~sdb/polycon". Tournament booking: Steve Cansdale, 26 Dolphin Tower, London SE8 5TG **0181 691 3859**
taz2@ukonline.co.uk
Trade/General Enquiries: Meachelle Hudson, 20 Boxworth End, Swavesey, Cambridgeshire CB4 5RA 0370 663230

Fantasy Fair Seven
11th May
in association with the Peterborough Science Fiction Club at The Cresset Exhibition Centre, Bretton, Peterborough, Cambs
£1.50. Special guests include Michael White, author of *Science of the X-Files: The Truth.* 10.30-4pm SF/fantasy books and games including wargames *D&D,* etc. Comics, mags. CCGs, figures, models, film and TV collectables, videos and records Contact Bruce King, 1 The Hallards, Eaton Socon PE19 3QW **01480 216372** or Peter Cox at the PSFC **01733 370542** (evenings)

Nottingham Magic
17th May
DC sanctioned *Magic* tourney. The Thurland Hall, Pelham St, Nottingham. Standard type. Swiss system. 40 players 11am-6pm (doors open 10.30am) £2. Rachel Sisson, 54 Park Avenue, Kimberley, Notts NG16 2PW **0115 938 3918**

The 8th Beer & Pretzels Games **Weekend**
17th-18th May
Town Hall, Burton on Trent. Wargames, boardgames, *Magic, Battletech, AD&D.*10am-10pm Saturday, 10am-7pm Sunday. £3 per day, £5 for both. (£3.50/£6 on the door.) Contact: Spirit Games, 98 Station Street, Burton on Trent, Staffs DE14 1BT Contact: Phil on **01283 511293** email: **salnphil@spiritgames.u-net.com**

Birmingham Magic
18th May
DC sanctioned *Magic* tourney. King George V Public House, Bristol Rd S, Longbridge, Birmingham. Standard. Swiss system. 72 players. 12.30pm-10pm (doors open 12am) £3. Contact Simeon Jones, 58 Trescott Rd, Northfield, Birmingham B31 5QA **0121 608 6768 simjon@waverider.co.uk**

Dundee Magic
19th May
DC sanctioned *Magic* tourney. Deacon Brodies Tavern, Ward Rd, Dundee. 64 players. 1pm-10pm (doors open 12.30) £3. Contact: Stuart Gosden, EMAILE, 7/4 Magdalene Gardens, Edinburgh, Lothian EH15 3DG **0131 467 4540**

Swindon & District 9
25th May
DC sanctioned *Magic* tourney at Cricklade Town Hall, High St, Cricklade, Swindon SN6 6AE. 128 players. 10.45am-9pm (doors open 10am) £3. Contact Martin Steed, 6 Goddard Avenue, Swindon SN1 4HR **01793 532939**
martin.steed@trw.com

Nottingham Magic
26th May
DC sanctioned *Magic* tourney. The Thurland Hall, Pelham St, Nottingham. Standard type. Swiss system. 40 players. 7pm-11pm (doors open 6.30) £2. Rachel Sisson, 54 Park Avenue, Kimberley, Notts NG16 2PW 0115 938 3918

Pro Tour New York
30th May-1st June
The *Magic* biggie.

Magic maintains momentum

New expansion set and introductory game on the way

Hot on the heels of the Magic: The Gathering 5th Edition comes yet another expansion set: Weatherlight. Due to be release in June, Weatherlight will offer 160 new cards, packaged in 15-card boosters.

The loose storyline for the expansion set involves the journey of the flying ship, Weatherlight, as it flies from imperial Benalia through the forests of Llanowar to Bogardan. This, then, is the context for the art and flavour text.

What about the mechanics of the cards? Expect to see more cumulative upkeep, more cantrip cards and more flanking and phasing. One concept that it is new for Weatherlight is the expanded use of the discard pile.

"In the past, players could only tinker with effects that dealt with cards coming in and out of play," said Dan Cervelli, a designer of Weatherlight. "We [the designers] felt that the concept of using the discard pile as a resource had not yet been fully explored. The discard pile will no longer be looked upon as used resources with little value. Now it will be a fresh source of magic with which to cast powerful spells."

Weatherlight will be compatible with basic Magic: The Gathering, as well as with Ice Age and Mirage.

In a bid to expand the horizons of Magic still further, Wizards of the Coast are launching a new introductory version of the game. Magic: The Gathering - Portal will be released at the same time as Weatherlight (June), and will attempt to go one stage further than the previous two-deck starter packs on offer.

Each Portal card set includeds two pre-constructed 35-card decks; a booster pack of 15 cards, plus a strategy tip card; a detailed play guide; play mats; and a rulebook.

"Portal is the ideal way to learn the techniques of playing Magic: The Gathering," said Richard Garfield. "Magic: The Gathering is the kind of game that can be played at many different levels, depending on individual skill and commitment.

"Portal... reduces the learning curve required to reach the higher level of play assumed in the original version. Portal is a great way to attract new players, at the same time broadening the field of players for anyone who enjoys Magic: The Gathering."

Portal will be compatible with existing Magic cards, and will feature over 200 new illustrations.

We'll have full reviews of Weatherlight and Portal in a future issue of arcane. Just as soon as we get hold of the cards.

ELECTION SPECIAL

seymour

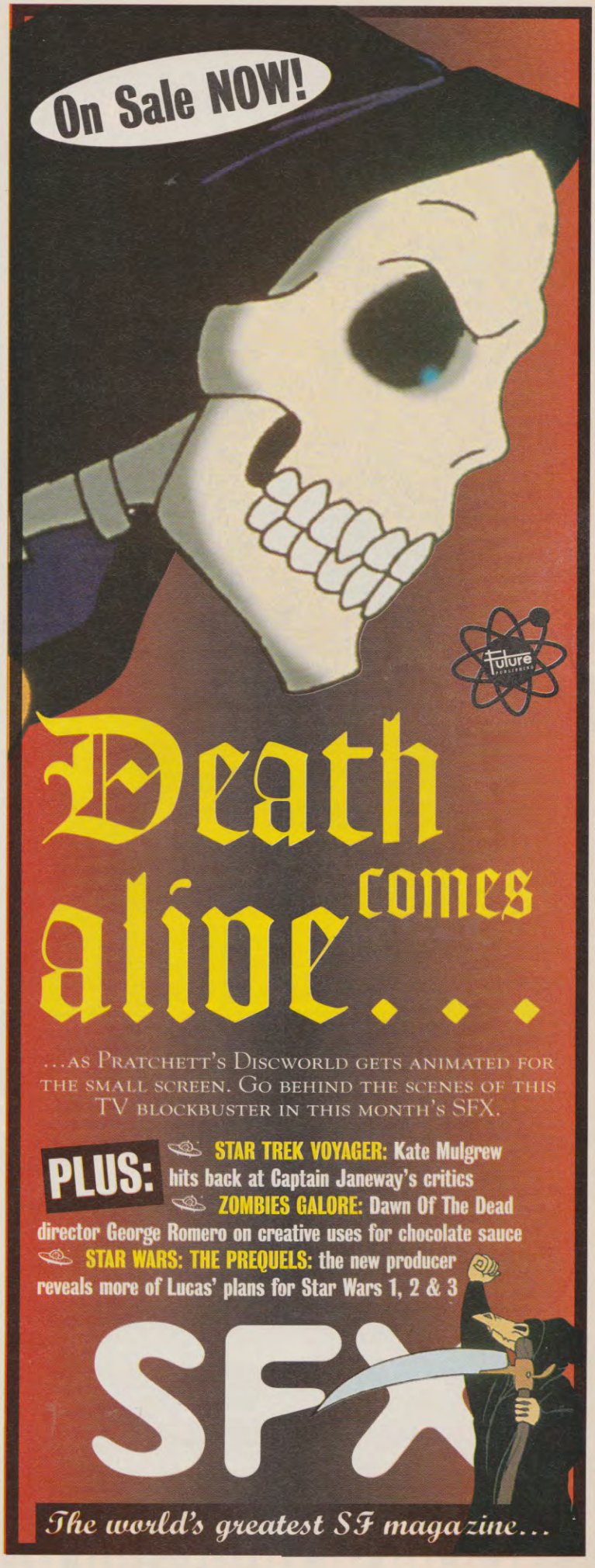
Wherein Seymour totally fails to unveil any roleplaying politicians of any persuasion...

As ewe may all-rayedy be a 'were', ah hem. There is forthcoming in thar nayshun currantly know-en as thaar Yoonaatedkingdum to be a 'General Election' at which it will be deseeded who gits to pawn off all of you-er nashunal proper tea to raise the fah-nancies nececelery to dig up all the fields and woodlands of these islands and replace thay-em with tarmac for automobibilies.

As ah am mah-sayelf currantly resident in an earhole of woodland – way-are ah abaad with thar 'liddle people' – this is a matter of grate impotence to me. Not no-ing which way to swing, ah hav therefore Tekken pre-empty acshun bah speaking to the Parties concerned to discern how thay stand with regards to re-housing thar ayelves and piskies after thay-are nacheral habitat has been deestroyed.

The liberal muscrats in the conservatories central orifices were both very polite but both informed me that they had too much informayshun at they-are fingerbobs and wood therefore git 'orf' to me a coomunicay-shun in the male. But ah infoamed thaym that ah mess mayek mah reeport nower as ah hev liftitlayt this month due to too much frolicking with mah li'l fray-ends in the springy glens and sun-speckled corpses and that there wuz no taam to delay.

But thay still diddun no. Ah contemplated offering to saynd thaym some cash but first ah rang the Labours whereapron ah wuz held me in a Q and thayn told that they wood hold a moratorium - a protective device - over all road buildings to assess the environmental impact if thay wier erected. But ah still didn't learn what wood become of mah homeless fray-ends...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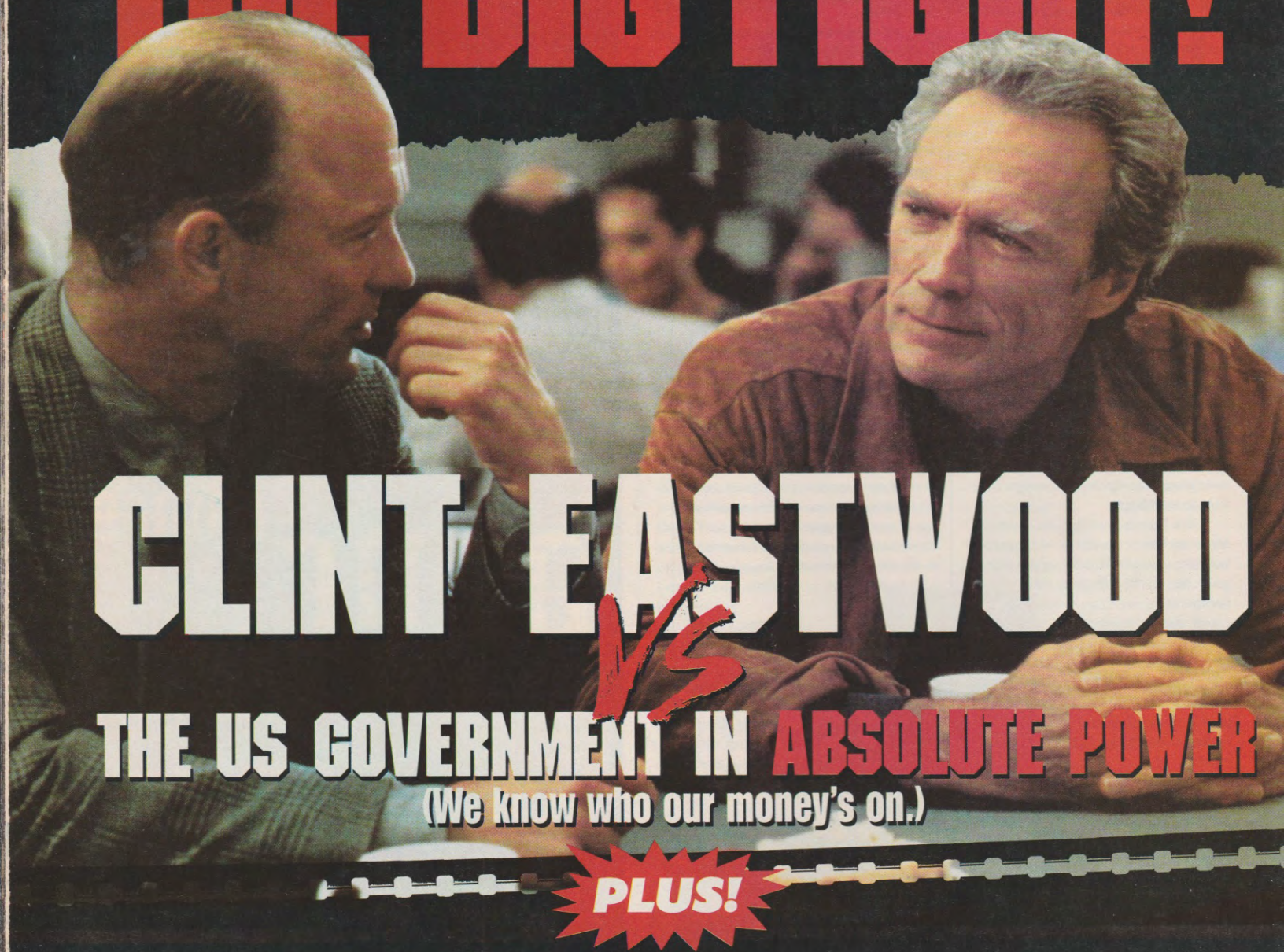
THE BIG FIGHT!



CLINT EASTWOOD VS THE US GOVERNMENT IN ABSOLUTE POWER

(We know who our money's on.)

PLUS!

Battlin' Brad Pitt VS Harrison "The Hammer" Ford in *The Devil's Own!*

Moviestar Bowels VS All Sorts Of Horrors in Great Filmic Toilet Scenes!

AND! Tom Sizemore VS A Bloody Great Monster in *The Relic!*

It's all in Total Film 5. On sale Thursday 8 May.

Win a copy of Champions: The New Millenium

We've got ten copies of the new Fuzion-powered superhero RPG to give away!

THE RULES OF THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY MAY NOT APPLY, BUT THESE RULES DOIs it a sort of strange book-shaped bird? Is it softbacked, multi-paged plane? No... it's... it's Champions: The New Millenium. Thanks to those kind-hearted folks at Gold Rush Games we've got ten copies to give away. Absolutely free. as a background book, or for anyone who likes Fuzion rules.

Q The Dark Knight Returns is a graphic novel about what?

A. The winter solstice
B. David Hasslehof
C. Batman

Just mark your entry 'Men in tights' and send it on a postcard or sealded-down envelope to:

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Bath
BA1 2BW
England

Or you can e-mail
arcane@futurenet.co.uk

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1. Entries must reach us by the 18th of May
2. Employees of Future Publishing, Hero and Gold Rush Games are banned from entering.
3. Anyone entering more than once will have their entries shredded.
4. The editor's decision is final.

next month in arcane

Villains or vigilantes?

Morality and motivation can be hard to come by in cyberpunk and street-level superhero games, where it's often hard to tell the good guys and the bad guys apart. So how do you keep your campaign on track? Dark Champions author Steven S Long has the answers.

Arabian nights

If you thought there was nothing more to Arabian roleplaying than flying carpets, curly-toed slippers and flashing scimitars, you're in for an education. Phil Masters holds forth on the land of minarets and muezzins.

No way out!

Claustrophobic? Too bad. This month Sam Johnson examines the advantages for horror referees of giving players no exit. Because if they can't walk back into normality, there's no waking from the nightmare.

Plus

Battling with necromancers in our fantasy encounter, How to play superheroes and cinematic heroes with panachce, Rules for CyberCthulhu, GMing at Gen Con, What you can steal from James Bond, plus loads of reviews and other stuff.

arcane 19 will be on sale on Friday 23th May

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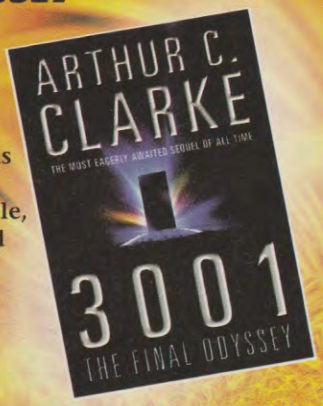
This month's news

Voyager no limits

log on for more information about Voyager on:
http://www.harpercollins.co.uk/voyager

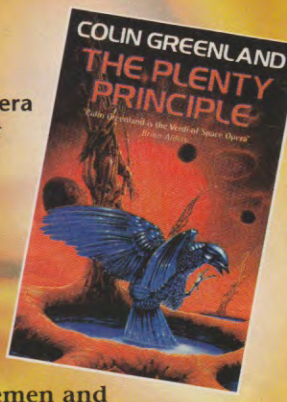
3001: THE FINAL ODYSSEY
Arthur C. Clarke



The most eagerly awaited sequel of all time from 'the colossus of science fiction' (*New Yorker*). The limitless power of the Monoliths is challenged by a machine-assisted inhabitant of AD 3001. Frank Poole, a resurrected astronaut, was killed by Hal in 2001. Now, his body retrieved from space and revived, Frank has unfinished business on Jupiter's moons.

Available 20 March £16.99

THE PLENTY PRINCIPLE
Colin Greenland

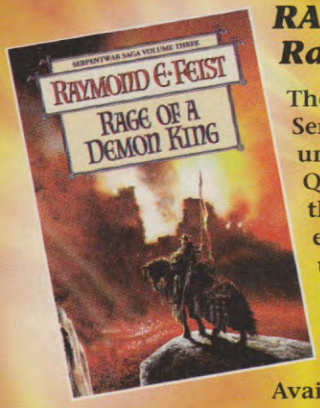


'Colin Greenland is a dab hand at space opera of the grungy, dirty-realist variety' *Time Out*

Greenland has won both the Arthur C. Clarke and the British SF Association awards and this collection incorporates the brand new Tabitha Jute novella, *The Well Wishers*, and his finest short stories. These include the author's curve on the Sandman and Michael Moorcock's Elric, alongside his own equally unsettling creations such as obstinate, canine policemen and long-dead ticket collectors in stations with no name.

Available 17 March £5.99

RAGE OF A DEMON KING
Raymond E. Feist



The third novel of Feist's staggering Serpentwar Saga sees Midkemia once more under the terrible shadow of the Emerald Queen. However, something far worse than the Queen's sorcery is afoot — for elemental, malevolent forces are being unleashed... forces that threaten to tear Midkemia apart. The long-missing sorcerer Marcos the Black must be tracked down and confronted.

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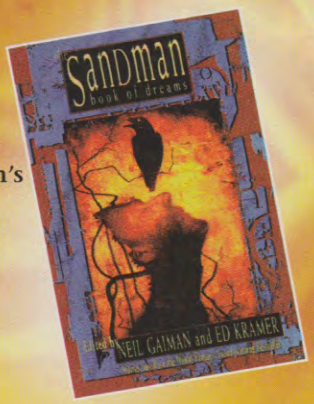
Ed. Neil Gaiman



Stephen King, Clive Barker, Tad Williams, Barbara Hambly and Tori Amos are just a few of the contributors to Neil Gaiman's collection of stories based on the hugely successful *Sandman* comics.

Available 17 March £5.99

This month, log on to the Voyager website for: An exclusive interview with Arthur C. Clarke by *Voyage* author Stephen Baxter. Plus up-to-the-minute news, and the chance to air your views.

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For mature readers

just where should we draw the line?

ANDREW RILSTONE

Andrew is the editor of *Interactive Fantasy*, the journal of roleplaying and story-making systems, and is also a regular contributor to arcane.

I CAME ACROSS AN INTERESTING new RPG yesterday. Entitled *Fractured Yesterdays*, it encourages you to roleplay sinister, shunned individuals who dwell on the fringes of human society, including such archetypes as 'P.E. Teacher', 'Catholic Priest' or the ever popular 'Man in a Raincoat'. PCs are given a minimum of resources – a bag of sweeties, some puppies, or a motor car – and progress through a number of scenarios of increasing difficulty. So, for example, the P.E. Teacher might progress from 'finding pretext for cold showers in February' to 'ritual dismemberment of entire fifth form', while the priest might aspire to be promoted from running the choir to having an entire orphanage to himself. I suppose the so-called moral majority will probably find some excuse to attack this product but, of course, no one is really hurt by it. From where I'm sitting, it's only a game.

Okay, I'm lying. So far as I know, no such game as *Fractured Yesterdays* has ever existed – although I do hear tell of a German RPG about serial murderers. But let's pretend (that's the name of the freeform interactive experience, after all) that it did. Would there be any grounds for objecting to it?

It's not a purely academic question. *Fractured Yesterdays* might be the product of my sick and perverted imagination, but Atlas Games' *Lunch Money* certainly isn't. For anyone who missed the (favourable) review in **arcane** last year, it's a beer and pretzels card game, dealing implicitly with the subject of playground fights and school bullying.

I say 'implicitly' because no one seems to be able to agree exactly what the cards represent. They show a little girl in various strange poses, accompanied by even stranger captions (quote: "Jesus hates you and so do I"). There is nothing remotely sexual, nor even particularly violent about the pictures, even the one which is supposed to represent "a poke in the eye", but a lot of people still think they are rather iffy ("dark and psychological" is how they are described on the box). Most peculiarly of all, the players are encouraged to describe "in vivid detail" the moves of the "merciless street fight" which the game represents (quote: "Two kicks to the jewels, ow!").

Is this a nasty product which encourages sickos to talk about their fantasies of hurting kids? Or an interesting and artistic product, enabling weeds like me to briefly re-live our childhood, pretending for five minutes that we were the duffers rather than the duffees? Or simply a silly joke in not particularly good taste?

If we say that *Lunch Money* makes light of cruelty to children, wouldn't we have to say that the classic *Teenagers From Outer Space* – in which high school kids of various species try to, er, get off with each other – is trivialising the very real problem of teenage pregnancy? What about the rather less classic *Alma Mater*, which was actually banned by some shops for its attitude to sex and drugs? Come to that, *The Skool Rools* published in **arcane** 3 contains a specific 'kaning' skill for NPC teachers. Isn't that joking about child abuse? I genuinely don't know.

I don't know about *In Nomine*, either. In many ways, it's a terrific product. Yet at its centre, we have someone taking material from the Holy Book of my religion and partly twisting it and partly making fun of it – all in the name of entertainment. When a character roles a triple 1 on three dice, we are told, "the Holy Spirit intervenes". Is that how much Steve Jackson cares about my God – only good for a cheap joke in a critical hits system?

I'm not saying that I want the archbishop of Canterbury to declare a fatwa against Steve Jackson. I'm not even saying that I won't play the game. I'm simply saying that this hurt my feelings. Slightly. Should Steve have cared about my feelings when he was putting it together? Should the non-existent authors of *Fractured Yesterdays* care about the feelings of real abuse victims?

It's a real dilemma for those of us who believe that RPGs are about telling stories, and that we should use them to tell the best damned stories we possibly can. Good stories tell the truth, and the truth is sometimes sick, shocking and nasty. Real children do sometimes poke each other in the eye; responsible adults do sometimes abuse their authority. White Wolf's *Changeling* RPG says that childhood is a time of purity, innocence and freedom, but anyone who can remember their childhood knows that this is a lie. If *Lunch Money* tells the truth, and in doing so makes us ask questions about our attitudes to violence in general and children in particular, isn't that a rather good thing?

RPGs routinely involve terrible events such as wars, murders, human sacrifice, black magic, and the destruction of the human race by creatures without enough vowels in their name. How often do we consider the implications of such actions? When your PCs start slaughtering orcs, are they engaging in ethnic cleansing? If your lawful good Paladin turned up in Putney, would people say he was a Nazi? Think about it. It might make a good story.

If we use our games to tell a story which deals with some touchy subjects like this then, yes, there is a danger that some of them will get into the hands of a *Daily Mail* journalist on a slow news day, and that s/he will write an article explaining that 'roleplaying games promote Nazism'. That, frankly, is their problem. We should not compromise our writing one jot to calm these people down.

But if we ever find ourselves putting controversial stuff into our games simply to shock or offend, to sell a few extra copies to the curious – or just because we think that upsetting and offending people is rather cool – then we deserve everything that's coming to us. Surely we are all mature enough to know the difference.

"If *Lunch Money* makes us ask questions about our attitudes to violence, isn't that a rather good thing?"

FLUFFY GAMES

If you want innocent, wholesome games why not play:

He-Man the RPG: So wholesome it doesn't even have a combat system!

Villains and Vigilantes: Squeaky clean heroes who (in the first edition, at any rate) have to obey the Comics Code Authority.

Leap of the Lion: One of four *Narnia Solo Gamebooks*. "If you think you know the Golden Rule, go to paragraph 267." C.S. Lewis is spinning in his grave.

DragonRaid: Venture into Eden again to rescue the Once Born from the Dragon's temptations. Role against your 'Love' 'Joy' and 'Peace' attributes. Then thank the Lord this is the world's only evangelistic RPG.

SPIKY GAMES

If you want bad taste games, consider:

Blood!: A modern horror game based on slasher movies, with pages of critical hits tables for screwdrivers, kitchen knives, chainsaws...

HOL: Complete with a 'claimer' assuring you that the authors of this game *do* approve of violence, drug-taking, devil worship and so on.

Rapture: The Second Coming: A game about Armageddon. Lucifer becomes Pope and things go downhill from there.

Rat on a Stick: Tunnels and Trolls scenario about running a fast food franchise for monsters. Need I say more?

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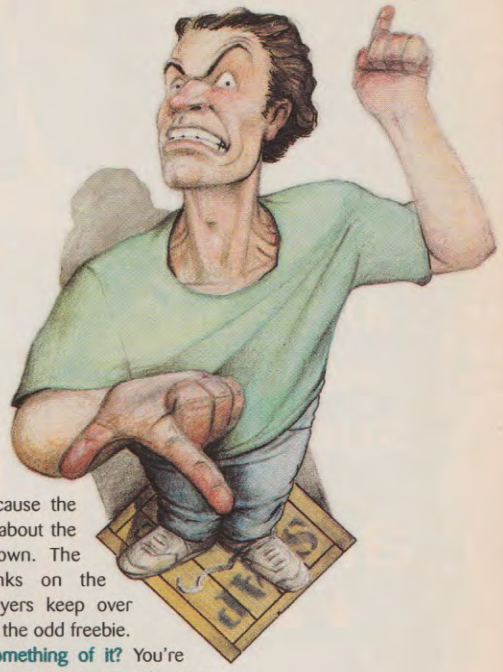
Cheats never prosper



cheating never pays off, especially if, like **Hywel T Phillips**, you know how to handle the offenders.

IT IS SAID THAT THERE ARE no winners or losers in roleplaying games. If this is true, how can you possibly be a cheat? But we all know that you can. Here's a spotter's guide and some suggestions of how to deal with them...

IS IT WRITTEN? A variant of the Retrofitter is the Equipment Geek. He writes things on his character sheet as he needs them. Solution: confiscate his pencil.

1. Captain Dicebomber. Always rolls a critical just at the right time to save the day, never fumbles at a vital moment. Captain Dicebomber is at work. When rolling 1d100, he'll roll the tens dice first, then bounce the units dice off it to get a better roll. He's got a funny dice that rolls high. Maybe he just lies about the result. Captain Dicebomber often hates seeing a plan that the party have been working on for weeks of real time go to hell because of a bad roll. Sometimes he just wants the story to be more dramatic – how often do film stars fail to get the bad guy at the end?

The cure is easy: luck points. Let the players re-roll the dice three times a session. Fumbles get rarer and don't screw up the story, but bad things can still happen. Roll less often – most systems give an unreasonably high chance of screwing up. How often do you crash while driving a car? Hopefully not as often as the few percent most game systems suggest.

2. The Power Gamer. His characters are the most impressive: best stats, best guns, best armour, best car. Let him carry on. Indeed, encourage him – give him what he wants (as long as it doesn't ruin the game totally) but require lots of story hooks in return. World's strongest man? Fine, but either you pump iron all day or you've got some special powers. Treat the other players the same way, but don't worry if they don't take the option up. Game balance is overrated – I ran a successful campaign where one PC was a goddess and the others were small-town militiamen.

3. The Mini-Maxer. Can't leave his character points alone. Colour-blind in one eye, shrapnel in the little finger of his left hand, protector of dozens of dependents (all of whom are unable to tie their own shoelaces), the Mini-Maxer squeezes the rules 'till they pop. The solution: tell him not to be so silly, cross out a few disadvantages and give all the players that many extra points.

> "Captain Dicebomber rolls the tens dice first, then then bounces the units dice of it to get a better roll."

4. The Retrofitter. "But I'm a sailor! Of course I can untie the knot!" Despite hours of character generation, the retrofitter keeps finding things that his character should be able to do but doesn't have the skill for. Some people love designing everything about their character from the start – they're the ones who turn up with a ten-page life story. They'll have taken Untie Knots skill. Other people can't do this. They develop their character in play, as s/he interacts with the rest of the gameworld. The initial skill list will be a guess, because the player doesn't know enough about the character to write it all down. The solution: leave some blanks on the character sheet. Let the players keep over some skill points or give them the odd freebie.

5. You wanna make something of it? You're having a drink with the chief investigator in a murder case to tease some information out of him. Joe leaps in, grabs the investigator by the throat and starts to throttle him. Any situation is an excuse for violence. Not so much a cheat as an awkward individual, this player is totally unwilling to co-operate with the others. He's a pain unless all the party are like him. Just let the law take its natural course with his characters (see the cover feature in **arcane** 17 for some advice on how this might happen).

6. Munchkin Kiddy from Hell. All of the above rolled up into one adorable little bundle. Tell him to go away and come back when his mental age exceeds his shoe size.

Sometimes players seem to be cheats because they've misunderstood the nature of the game, the unspoken contract between the players and the referee. These are some common ones...

1. Tell us a story. We want a tale of derring-do and gritty horror. The most important thing is the conventions of the genre. Things should happen the way they would in a Lovecraft book or an action movie, and hang the sense of it.

2. Make us a place to live. We want something self-consistent and believable. Internal logic is very important – we want to feel that the characters are living inside a perfect simulation of another world.

3. Thrills and Spills, man! We want adrenaline, and we want it now. Forget angst-ridden soul-searching, we want to be on the edge of our seats all evening.

4. Take us away from the real world, right now! We want rose-tinted specs. Let us sunbathe on beautiful islands waiting for the next chance to save the world. Never confront us with the orphans whose parents got caught in the cross-fire last time we fought Professor Peril.

5. Do whatever you like as long as we have fun. Ignore the rules, rewrite our character sheets, or have us play each other's characters, just make sure that we enjoy it.

6. Be fair. We're keeping track of winners and losers here and we'd appreciate it if you didn't play favourites.

7. What's our motivation for this scene? We want to be sad when someone dies, elated when we win, torn by love triangles. Give us time, sit back and let us roleplay.

REFEREE'S IMMUNITY Cheating doesn't really apply to referees. You can ignore die rolls, rules, whatever, so long as the game works. Best to let the players think you're not cheating, however. If you're swinging things in their favour and they find out, it'll take the edge off their victory.

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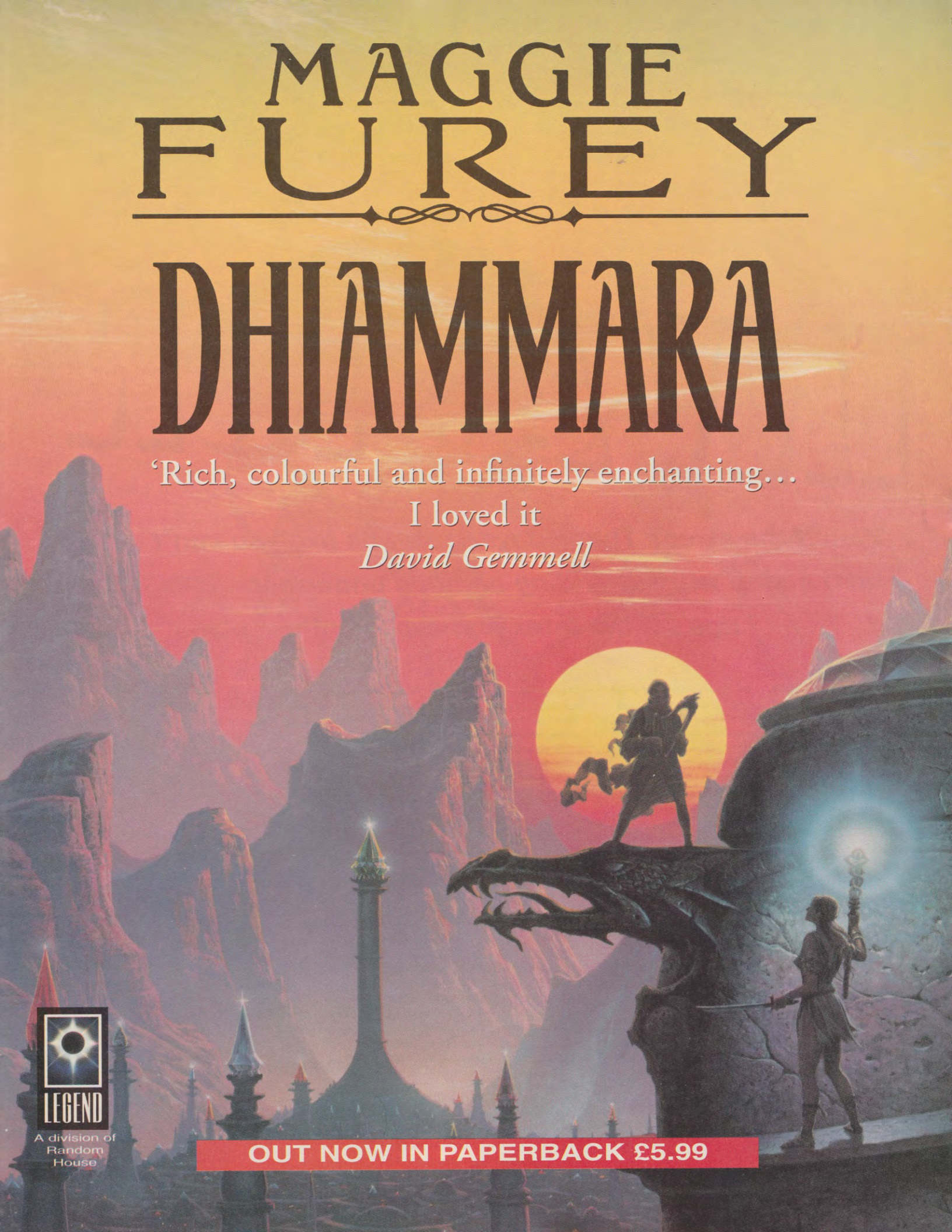
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ALIEN INVASION

Watch the skies? These days, it seems like you can't even take a step without finding an alien underfoot. John Tynes rips off the latex and exposes their plans.

LIFEFORCE
"Within days, we could all be doomed."

STARSHIP TROOPERS
by Robert Heinlein
"If we killed a warrior, or a thousand, or ten thousand, his, or their replacements were hatched and on duty almost before we could get back to base."

Beings from outer space are coming to take over the world. What do you do? If you're a referee, you should congratulate yourself; you've picked a campaign-level plotline that's a breeze to plan, exciting to enact and easy to relate to. Alien invasions have populated our entertainments for decades and almost everyone has seen a film such as *Aliens* or *Independence Day*, or watched a television show like *The X-Files* or *The Tripods*, or – God forbid! – read a book such as *War of the Worlds* or *Starship Troopers*. Though the specifics will vary widely, your players will understand the nature of what is going on and will have a bank of stored experiences to draw upon when they have to figure out how to save the day. Of course, this also means that they'll have a set of expectations that you should delight in confounding.

But, I hear you cry: "It's all so trite! It's been done to death! I don't want to just rip off some movie!" Bah! We're going to rip off a whole bunch of movies. And TV shows. And books. And comics. You shouldn't be afraid to plunder pop culture in your pursuit of a fun RPG campaign. The advantage of drawing on such a rich entertainment tradition is that you can very quickly mix-and-match elements from different sources. You can keep the bits you like and discard the bits you don't. Besides, *you* know you could have plotted a better story than *Independence Day*. You just haven't bothered to prove it. Yet. Now's the time, chummie. Earth needs you!

Different is Bad

Every good RPG campaign thrives on conflict. Conflict is about opposition – me against you, us against them, Right against Wrong. The conflict may be emotional, political, or just physical, but whatever form it takes, it's the fuel that drives the engine of play. Developing a successful RPG campaign means choosing a source of conflict and there's nothing like alien war for making this choice easier. The history of warfare – the biggest and loudest form of conflict humanity practices – has taught us that the best way to fight an enemy is to dehumanize it. You have to convince your side that its adversaries are not even worth the breath they draw. We must therefore fight them that much harder because *we are right.*

Right off the bat, we've got the root of our campaign's thematics. Our foes are not human. This isn't a dispute over lines on a map, nor over who controls what oil fields, nor the fact that some potentate got whacked in the streets of Sarajevo. This is about being different. And different is Bad. Defeating the different and leaving only the familiar is Good. Aliens are very different and therefore very Bad. This is the essence of the alien invasion campaign.

In the course of developing your campaign, you'll be tweaking this in all sorts of ways. The aliens may not be so different after all and there may be sympathetic factions within the invading force. But this core thematic is what is going to get under your players' skins. This is what's going to get them up in arms to stop the aliens and save the day. It's the primal itch that your players will be dying to scratch. Don't be afraid to use kneejerk reactionary xenophobia to manipulate the players in your game. You must excite their enthusiasm, push their buttons. Simple ideas are powerful ideas. Different is Bad. Destroy the different. Save the world.

Developing Your Aliens

Aliens come in all shapes and sizes – except on *Star Trek*, where they just have weird noses as well as a variety of psychologies and goals. One of the first

Illustration © arcane by Lee Gibbons

Alien Goals

Just what the heck do these crazed fiends from another world want, anyway? Here are some suggestions...

Genetic material

Earthlings have some genetic quirk that makes our double helix the, erm, cat's pyjamas. Aliens after our bodies might merely be harmless collectors of fingernail clippings, but it's more likely that they have to run you through a meat grinder to get a good sample.

Terraforming

Evincing an uncannily human-like mindset, these aliens have trashed their homeworld's eco-system and want to start from scratch on ours. They may well want to nuke the whales first.

Galactic Bureaucracy

Earth poses some sort of perceived threat to a vast alien organization. Perhaps our orbit screws up some of their jump-drive routes, as in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy,* or perhaps they anticipate us gaining faster-than-light travel and wreaking havoc. Whatever the case, we've been targeted for extinction, not conquest.

God and Country

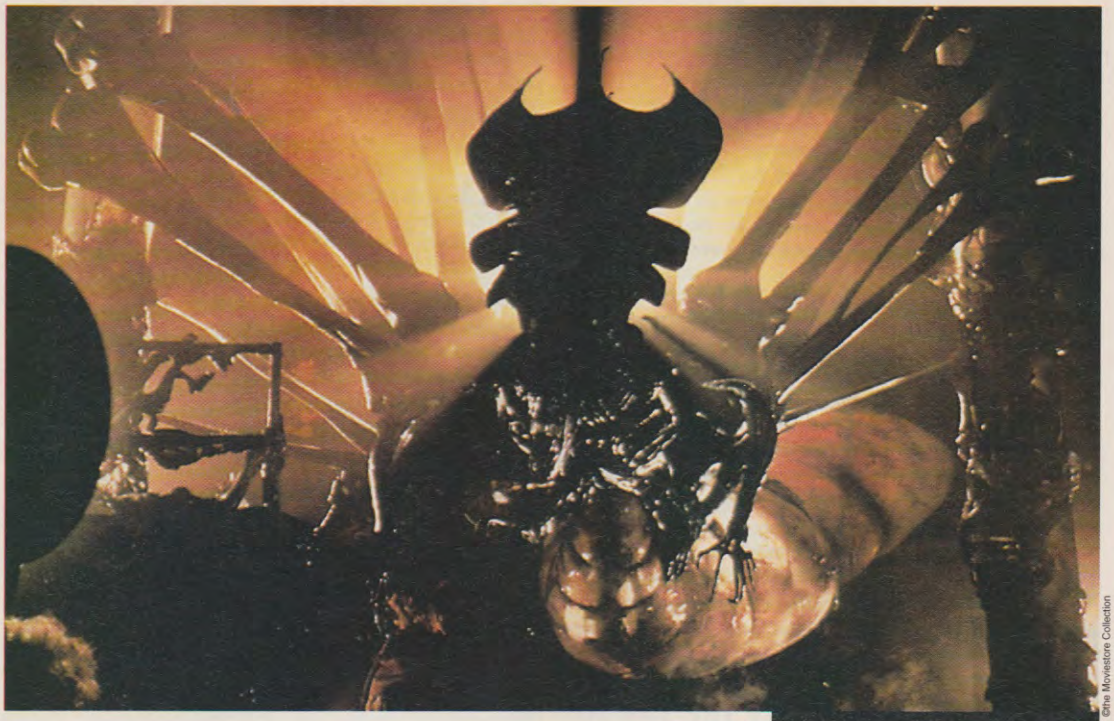
The Crusades go galactic. An interstellar army out to convert heathen worlds to the One True Way, and lock up all the mineral rights in the bargain. You get eeriness points if the One True Way resembles an Earth religion, plus special Von Daniken/*Stargate* bonus points if the religion is Meso-American or Egyptian in aesthetics, if not in ethos.

Insurrection

The aliens seem nefarious, sure, but in reality they're just using extreme measures to prepare Earth for the coming of a much greater threat. They want to use us to oppose the Big Galactic Empire and they don't care if they break a few eggs along the course towards a utilitarian end.

A Dash of Salt

Psychology? Motivation? Bah! Humans taste good. We are here to eat you. Yum.



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▲ ALIENS A great example of convincing alien psychology. What do they want? We don't know. How did they get here? We don't know. What are they thinking? We don't know. Are they believable? Strangely, yes.

should include a number of asides and touchstones which will hopefully subsequently trigger recollections in your mind of minor details you thought of during this process.

Planning The Invasion

Now that you know who your aliens are and what goals they have in mind, you need to plan the invasion. Looking at the wealth of alien invasion entertainments, we can break types of invasions down to a handful. We can further consider each of these types to have an introduction; a guide to running the opening stages of the invasion, followed by a guide to running the main portion of the invasion. You might begin your campaign where the invasion begins or you might start playing with the invasion already well under way. For each type, we will consider the starting point of the invasion first, before moving on to the main course.

All-Out War

Astronomers spot them first. A fleet of fast-moving craft appears outside of the Moon's orbit. Within days the invasion begins. You'll have to decide if the attack will be air-based or ground-based. Do they have lots of swift aircraft, like in *Independence Day,* or will this be more like the attack on Hoth in *The Empire Strikes Back?* You'll also need to work out what role the player characters have. Are they miscellaneous folks caught on the front lines of the attack? Are they pursuing their own goals, with the alien invasion simply serving as a backdrop? Are they in a position to lead Earth's response to the invasion? With that settled, you'll need to map out early events and responses. Where do the aliens strike first? What counter-attacks are launched? Don't just go for random destruction. Keep the goals you defined earlier in mind and make sure that the aliens' attacks are helping them to achieve those goals. You might also want to consider whether or not the aliens will engage in any sort of misdirection in this early stage, to disguise their true agenda.

Either way, the battle rages on.

"The wealth of entertainments in this sub-genre means not only that a plethora of ideas are close at hand, but that you don't even have to buy a single sourcebook!"

Earth is a flaming ruin. Major population centres have been decimated. The aliens are everywhere. Organized defence exists solely on the local level. Large-scale terrestrial military structures have been shattered. However, at the scale that the player characters operate on, there's lots to do. Entire cities are burning. Natural disasters are occurring as a result of the attack. First-aid stations are overwhelmed, and food is in short supply.

Where do the player characters start? They might be waging guerilla attacks against local alien installations. They might choose a particular locality to defend, from the aliens as well as from looters or opportunistic crime lords. They might be holing up in a secret hideout, sneaking out only to gather supplies and recruit non-player characters allies for some future assault. Or, they may be plotting to end the invasion through unconventional means, such as a secret weapon, fomenting a coup within the alien ranks, holding the alien leader hostage, or who knows what else.

Trust No-One

The Invaders asked: "Can the man sitting next to you bend his little finger? If not, he's an alien infiltrator!" This style of invasion is secretive. It often involves either aliens who look like humans, or humans who collaborate with, or are mind-controlled by the aliens. Examples include *The X-Files, Invasion of the Body Snatchers, The Thing,* and H P Lovecraft's story *The Whisperer in Darkness.* The theme of this style is paranoia, because you never can be sure who is your enemy and who is your

ALIEN INVASION

friend. Kick off your campaign with isolated peculiar incidents that gradually point the player characters towards the awful truth. This stage of the 'Trust No-One' style is over once the player characters understand the aliens methodology and have gleaned something of their plans.

In Robert Heinlein's novel *The Puppet Masters,* people quickly begin going around naked because the aliens were parasitic critters that clung to your back and plugged into your spine. A man wearing a coat is the enemy. Shoot! You might not want to get quite that wacky, but this is definitely the 'Us-Against-Them' stage of the 'Trust-No-One' style. The important thing is that no-one should believe the player characters. No reliable proof can be gathered, authority figures who believe you are killed or replaced, and it's basically up to the player characters to save the world. The player characters will probably have a quick method of identifying aliens among the populace. Setting up numerous scenes of sudden chaos, even a shopping trip to the mall can turn into a mêlée when the player characters realize that the department store Santa Claus has that peculiar scar on the back of his hand. Furthermore, the aliens will now be aware enough of the player characters' existence and opposition to their schemes to actively hunt or persecute them. The alien infiltrators/collaborators can wipe out the player characters' bank accounts, get false charges filed against them, and generally try to run them to the ground.

Crawling Horror

One lone alien can be all you need at the beginning of the invasion, as the films *Alien, The Hidden,* and *Predator* ably demonstrate. This style of invasion represents the incursion of a lone alien invader intent on some particular mission, and who comes into conflict with the player characters. While it may seem that this would only be good for a one-night adventure, that's not the case. You don't have to make it a resolvable physical conflict, at least not at first. Your player characters could spend several adventures tangling with a distant, unseen adversary whose machinations have a ripple effect that brings trouble to the player characters' door. They'd have to track the alien down, learn its plans, and bring it to a stop. But defeating one alien may not be the end of the story, it may be only the beginning

You thought one was bad? How about a bunch more? Appropriately enough, the sequels *Aliens* and *Predator 2* handle this topic fairly well. By this point in the campaign, the lone incursion of an alien invader can be placed in context. Sure, it was after one thing, but that was just a sign of things to come. Now there is a bunch of them, operating openly. This stage of the 'Crawling Horror' style is not dissimilar to All-Out War, except that it exists only at the scale of your player characters' operations, rather than at a global scale. Nevertheless, the foes here are more likely to be hand-to-hand opponents with special fighting prowess or peculiar abilities, rather than hordes of troops in warships. This style falls more on the terror end of the terror/tension axis. These aliens don't kick down doors with their big jackboots, they leap out of shadows and get you in a stranglehold, when you least expect it.

Roads to Victory

Sooner or later, the campaign must end. You should plan ahead and anticipate the sorts of endings that are likely. This way you won't be caught by surprise. This is the point of the 'What Can Stop Them?' portion of the alien-creation process. The trick here is that you can't just conceptualize what endings are possible, you need to lay the groundwork to support those endings. The players can always come up with something unexpected, of course, but you should at least be confident that they won't be floundering about without direction when it's needed.

> *"Every point of definition is a potential point of vulnerability."*

So, for each point of vulnerability you identified earlier, set up 'clue paths' that the players can follow to learn about those points. Clue paths consist of incremental advances towards gaining a full understanding of one point of alien weakness, with each advance carrying an increased level of danger. Some paths should be 'action-directed', some should be 'investigation-directed', and some should be 'roleplaying-directed'. An action-directed path could be that destroying the reactor at the alien's stronghold on Earth will wipe out their invasion fleet, if you do it at the right time. An investigation-directed path could be that a biological weakness of the aliens can be exploited with a new piece of technology or a type of virus. A roleplaying-directed path could be to convince an alien commander to overthrow his superiors and seize the throne back home, rather than mucking around over here in the backwaters of the Galaxy.

AT THE MOUNTAINS OF MADNESS
By H P Lovecraft
"It is absolutely necessary, for the peace and safety of mankind, that some of Earth's dark, dead corners and unplumbed depths be let alone; lest sleeping abnormalities wake to resurgent life, and blasphemously surviving nightmares squirm and splash out of their black lairs to newer and wider conquests."

Once you've got these basic clue paths set up – some action-directed, some investigation-directed and some roleplaying-directed – you need to have two entrances to each clue path. One entrance should be ready and waiting to reward player initiative, the other should be something you can drop in their laps if they're clueless. Using the investigation-directed path as an example, the player-initiative entrance would be that if the player characters decide to orchestrate research into alien biology – stealing equipment, setting up a lab, convincing a scientist to help, and so on – you need to know what sort of stuff they'll need, what obstacles will be in their way, who they'll need to get on their side, and what practical results such research will produce. The player-clueless entrance would be to have the scientist come to them for help and thereby kick them in the pants. Perhaps they free him from alien confinement as a by-product of rescuing someone else.

You don't need to spend a lot of time developing these clue paths. Just set up the entrances and ultimate results of each one and put them aside. When the time comes and the players get on to one of those paths, that'll be the point at which you need to start fleshing out the specific steps.

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▲THE PREDATOR
A great example of how to build up the tension using a single alien. And it's all achieved because you can't see him – unless, obviously, he wants you to.

So, can you save Earth?

So now you should be pretty much ready, with a good idea of the overall feel of your campaign. And don't worry if your imagination seems to be stalling: the wealth of entertainments in this sub-genre means not only that a plethora of ideas are close at hand, but that you'll never even have to buy a single sourcebook! A few trips to the video store, a brief ransacking of your friends' libraries, or even just a browse around the Internet is bound to turn up plenty of really good examples of alien invasions. So just make up some cool stuff, plan it all out, and save the Earth.

Don't dawdle, though. Don't you know there's a war on?

ALIEN STARGATE
The Internet is packed with lots of interesting alien-related tomfoolery. Try this web site at http://members.aol.com/alienb25/alien.html for an eclectic survey of 'real' alien invasions.

Nobody's Perfe

*Creating an invincible demi-god isn't what roleplaying is all about. Real heroes have problems. **Steve Peterson** of Hero Games explains...*

Elric is a cripple. Han Solo is hunted by Jabba the Hutt. Sherlock Holmes is addicted to taking cocaine. Fictional characters are rarely perfect. Like the rest of us, they have their problems. Many roleplaying games, including *Champions* and *GURPS*, allow or require you to create characters with flaws, disadvantages, quirks, or complications.

The obvious reason for creating a character with such difficulties would seem to be that the game's rules reward you for doing so by giving you more points to use on your character's additional abilities. But some character creation processes give your character problems without offering you a reward.

> "A few well-chosen flaws can be a lot of fun to roleplay."

The reasoning behind this is partly that problems are an important part of a character; problems make a character more well-rounded, more realistic, or at least more like the fictional heroes that are the archetypes for many roleplaying characters.

But while realism may be important to players and referees seeking the right atmosphere for their game, it's not the only reason that characters should have problems. Nor is it the most important reason. Characters should have problems because it makes playing the game easier and more fun for the players and the referee. How? Let's see.

IT'S CHARACTER BUILDING

First off, problems make it easier for players to begin creating a unique character. A list of abilities really gives you very little idea of what a character is like; knowing that your character is fairly strong, quite fast, very tough and moderately clever tells you nothing about whether he is mean or friendly. Knowing that the character can pick locks, drive nearly any vehicle, is a good shot with a gun and is an expert gambler still doesn't tell you whether or not they would be inclined to help a stranger in distress, whether they have an optimistic outlook, or whether they are generally fearful.

You can decide those things for yourself and, with some work, build up a personality for your character, perhaps modelling them on a fictional source or on people you know. But if the character has some in-built problems, the task of creating a personality suddenly gets easier because you have some starting points for your creation.

If the character has a weakness for gambling and loves to take risks and place bets, then you have some insight into how the character might react to a challenge. If you know the character is being hunted by a world-spanning organisation of assassins, then you know he'll always be on the lookout for them and that he'll always be under a certain amount of stress no matter where he is.

Problems give you some basic points about a personality and make it easier for you to build up a consistent personality for your character. This makes it easier for you to decide how to react when the referee presents you with new situations and when the other characters interact with yours.

Perhaps most important of all, though, a few well-chosen flaws can be a lot of fun to roleplay. I'll never forget the look on the referee's face when my superhero from the future, who had the Disadvantage "Ignorant of modern-day Earth culture and technology", blithely stepped into an open elevator shaft saying: "I'll just take this grav-lift down to the first floor". I would never have done such a stupid thing if the character hadn't had that Disadvantage.

THAT'S ANOTHER STORY

If a character has no problems, no worries, no fears, nor any strong motivations, how do you even get them to go on an adventure? You could kidnap the characters, but that trick would get old after the first few times. Playing on the motivations of the characters is much better.

If a character is hunted by some villain, then you can have the villain show up and attack. If the character is driven to help people in need, then a person can show up who desperately needs help. For the referee, a character with flaws is much, much easier to manage.

Once an adventure begins, moving characters in the direction of the story becomes much easier if you know their flaws. Put a character's friend or beloved in danger. Have a character's deepest fear turn up. Bring in a villain to force action to occur. Whenever things slow down, or the characters seem to lose track of what's going on, you can use their character flaws to bring the game back on course and up to full speed.

Thinking of new adventures can become as easy as picking a flaw from a character sheet and deciding to do something about it that evening. Any character flaw or problem can be turned into an adventure.

If a character is being pursued by some villain, that presents at least one obvious adventure. A loved one? Kidnap them. A weakness for gold and jewels? Mutter something about the Lost Hoard of the Great Dragon. Is a character seeking revenge for the murder of his family? Why, it just so happens that the perpetrator of that horrid crime is visiting the city. The flaw presents a hook on which to hang a plethora of tantalising possibilities.

Work on combining problems from different characters, either as separate subplots, or as part of the main storyline. Life can get very difficult when two different characters' nemeses team up. Or when one character's compulsion forces them to travel to a place that absolutely terrifies another character.

WHAT'S YOUR PROBLEM?

While different games have classified character problems in different ways, it is useful to distinguish between internal and external problems; those that arise from the character's nature and those that arise from the character's actions.

Internal problems can be further sub-divided between the psychological and the physical. The character may have a strong code of honour, or of loyalty to a person or a cause, or they may fear something. Strong desires would also fall into this category, problems such as a reckless nature or a desire for wealth. A very common problem for characters the existence of a loved one who they must protect from all harm.

Physical problems include a wide variety of things, from missing or impaired limbs, poor senses or illness, to a distinctive appearance. Such drawbacks have the effect either of making the character easily recognisable, or perhaps having an overly strong effect on other people. In some genres, such as superhero or

At his side hung Stormbringer. The man withou
energy - the sword without the man could.not d
They rode together man and sword, and none co

Steve Peterson is the co-founder of Hero Games, co-designer of *Champions*, a computer and video games designer and the author of several computer game strategy guides. He lives with his wife and two sons on the coast south of San Francisco, California. Lucky bleeder. His latest game design work is *Fuzion*.

Thanks to Chris Achilios for the use of his Elric image. Chris is currently compiling a collection of his artwork called 'Heroes, Angels and Amazons'. It will be published this June by FPG.

he sword could become a cripple, lacking sight and
the blood and souls it needed for its existence.
tell which was master.

Flaws of the Fictional Famous

Here are some examples of famous fictional characters and a listing of some of the key problems that help define their characters.

James Bond

James Bond, the archetypal super-spy, first appeared in the novels of Ian Fleming and has since become even more famous as the star of a series of very successful movies. Bond is hunted by several powerful enemies, such as Smersh (short for Smiert Shpionam, or Death to Spies) and SPECTRE (Special Executive for Counter-Terrorism, Revenge and Extortion). James Bond also has a reputation; his identity is known to many intelligence services and these have built up dossiers that give them a good idea of his psychology. Bond's internal flaws include his weaknesses for gambling, fine liquor and, of course, for beautiful women. Bond can be considered to have a dependent NPC; a beautiful woman. Her identity changes from adventure to adventure, but she's almost always there, getting into trouble and causing Bond to have to rescue her. In the later Bond stories, Bond's disadvantages often shape the plot. Several of the novels are about Bond's enemies trying to kill or capture him, using their knowledge of his weaknesses to help them in their efforts.

Frodo Baggins

Frodo is a hobbit living in the fantasy world of Middle Earth created by J R R Tolkien. *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, which tells Frodo's story, is the most popular fantasy series of all time.

Quite possibly, Frodo is the most hunted of all these characters, having as his predator The Dark Lord and all his minions. Frodo also has his faithful dependent NPC, Sam Gamgee. Frodo has one overwhelming psychological problem; his powerful sense of morality and personal obligations. Only a very powerful compulsion could drive someone to accept the task placed before Frodo.

Elric

Elric is the creation of Michael Moorcock and stars in several of the author's novels and short stories. He is a warrior, a sorcerer and the last emperor of the dying race of Melnibone. Elric has a number of powerful disadvantages. Physically, he is unusually weak and must take drugs, or use the sorcerous hellblade Stormbringer to maintain a normal strength. Sorcerously bound to Stormbringer, he is also an albino, which has the disadvantage of making him easy to recognise.

Psychologically, he has even more problems; he tends to go berserk in combat, and is melancholy a great deal of the time, brooding over the terrible fate that forces him to kill those he loves. In addition, Elric is hunted by a large number of powerful enemies throughout his saga, and he has a dependent NPC – a beautiful woman, whose identity changes from story to story.

> "All that night, Spider-Man stood by the docks, aware at last of one basic, abiding truth; with great power, there must also come great responsibility. It was a lesson he would never forget."
>
> *Mayhem in Manhattan* by Len Wein & Marv Wolfman

Captain Kirk

Captain James T Kirk is the captain of the USS Enterprise in the original *Star Trek* television series. He has also starred in half a dozen movies about the adventures of the Enterprise. The TV series spun off an animated series, comic books and innumerable novels, as well as several new television series and movies.

Captain Kirk is the most famous captain in Starfleet and, as such, has a widespread reputation. He is constantly watched by the enemies of Starfleet – the Klingons and the Romulans in the original series. Kirk has the problem that he is ultimately responsible to Starfleet, although he is also an inveterate risk-taker, a trait which often leaves him at odds with Starfleet Command. He too has a well-known fondness for women but his real Achilles Heel is the Enterprise. Kirk can be considered to have dependent NPCs; the Enterprise and her crew.

Sherlock Holmes

The great detective was created by author Arthur Conan Doyle in the late 19th century. Holmes's popularity continues in the movies and television shows based on his adventures.

Holmes has a powerful reputation as the world's greatest detective, which makes it difficult for him to operate without a disguise. He is opposed by his great enemy, Moriarty, at least until the apocalyptic battle at Reichenbach Falls when they both apparently fall to their deaths. Holmes has a weakness for cocaine, especially when he is bored, and this debilitates him physically. Perhaps Holmes' greatest flaw is his inability to resist an intellectual challenge; he can leave no mystery unsolved if it's at all possible to solve it.

Spider-Man

Spider-Man is the most famous of all the Marvel Comics characters. He was created by Stan Lee in the 1960s, along with a number of other very popular Marvel superheroes. Spider-Man helped create a new era of comic books that focused on much more 'human' superheroes who had to deal with many personal as well as professional problems.

Spider-Man has many of the now classic weaknesses of superheroes. He protects his true identity of Peter Parker and keeping this secret causes him no end of troubles. He also has to worry about his dear old Aunt May and about his love life, which usually circles around Mary Jane Watson, though this has changed from time to time in the past. Of course, Spider-Man has many powerful supervillains who would love to capture or kill him. Perhaps his most relentless opponent over the years has been J Jonah Jameson, the publisher of the Daily Bugle, who also employs Spider-Man's secret identity of Peter Parker. This delicious irony causes a rich source of challenging plot twists for Spider-Man.

Problem Solved

A character's problems can change over time. Certainly, if the characters succeed in destroying the Dark Lord once and for all, he won't be hunting any of them again in the future. And many fictional heroes in long-running adventures – a series of novels or television shows, for instance – may always have some companion, often a lover, whom they must protect, even if the identity of the companion changes from episode to episode.

And there are those characters in fiction whose problems never seem to go away; they just get replaced by new problems. Eliminating a problem, or curing it somehow, can be a very satisfactory reward for successfully completing an epic adventure.

Alternatively, problems can be solved and the character cured of some, but not all, of their flaws. This is generally only a good idea if the character wants to grow in a certain direction, or if it becomes necessary as part of the story.

For example, if the playing characters destroy the entire organisation that hunts them, they can, of course, no longer be considered as 'hunted'. Furthermore, the problem might need to be removed because it has become an impedance to the game because it has reached the point where it is distracting from the key development of the adventures.

Even if your game system doesn't explicitly call for them, it can be a good idea to require each character to take at least one internal and one external flaw. You can have them make up whatever they want, or the referee can provide one that fits in the course of the first adventure or two. On the one hand The players will learn how much fun it is to have a character with problems. On the other, the referee will find it much easier to create and manage ever more exciting adventures.

fantasy, physical problems can also include a vulnerability to certain types of attacks, or a susceptibility to unusual substances or conditions.

External problems arise from actions of the character, or involve people other than the character. For example, a character may have a certain reputation. This would also make them more easily recognisable, and perhaps more predictable. Often, some enemy is watching or actively seeking the character for some evil purpose. Or the character may be concealing their true identity, the classic Secret Identity so often found in superhero comics. Alternatively, the character may be treated poorly by society because of their rank, caste, religion, race, ethnicity, or for some other reason.

Issue 1

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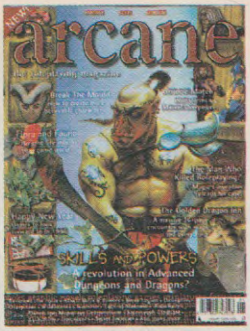
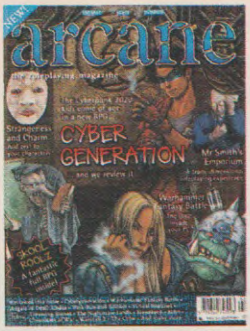


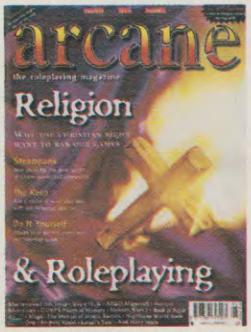
Issue 2 explored *AD&D: Skills & Powers*, interviewed Richard Garfield and the Encounter starred The Golden Dragon Inn.



Issue 3 had a free RPG called *Skool Roolz*, reviewed *Cybergeneration* and Mr Smith's Emporium was that month's Encounter.

Issue 4 explained RPGs for beginners, reviewed *Middle-Earth: The Wizards* and Stormburg materialised in the Encounter.

Issue 5 had Richard Garfield's ideas on *Netrunner*, reviewed *Vampire: The Dark Ages* and the Train pulled into our Encounter.



Issue 6 explained why the Christian Right wants to ban RPGs, reviewed *Netrunner* and gave you a Keep in the Encounter pull-out.

Issue 7 looked at creating a horror scenario, sent you to Prison in our pull-out Encounter and reviewed *Conspiracy X*.

Issue 8 discussed mysticism in games, offered free trials on 20 PBM games, reviewed *Alliances* and went into Space in the Encounter.

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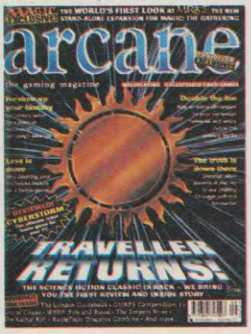

Issue 10 saw the return of *Traveller*, uncovered the secrets of The Dig in our pull-out Encounter and reviewed *The London Guidebook*.

Issue 11 looked at cyberpunk, reported from GenCon and took you to the Circus in the Encounter. We also reviewed *Fading Suns*.

Issue 12 debated the use of politics in RPGs, climbed aboard the Pirate Ship in the Encounter and reviewed a revised *Star Wars* RPG.

Issue 13 is lucky for any budding referees, first time LARPers and *Deadlands* or *Mirage* players. We visit Starkmoor Hall in the Encounter.

Issue 14 had the readers' 50 top RPGs, a deep-space probe in Encounters, a selection of *Mirage* combos and reviewed *Settlers*.

Issue 15 investigated conspiracy campaigns, placed its bets on the MegaCasino in Encounters, and reviewed *Ars Magica*.

Issue 16 published John Tynes' new RPG *Puppetland*, eyed the Superhero genre and reviewed 28 new releases. The Encounter was in the monastery.

Issue 17 reviewed *Visions* and *Masks of Nyarlathotep*, examined Celtic culture and went to the ancient library in the Encounter.

Issue 18 reviewed *In Nomine*, explored Viking culture, and looked at monsters in horror games. The Encounter was on an airship.

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THE OF THI

RPGs based on books, films or comics present special thrills and unique problems. Jim Swallow suggests ways to play them well.

Since the dawn of roleplaying there have been roleplayers who fancied a bash at playing in an established universe, one based on a favourite book, film or TV show. There's always been that moment in a story when you ask yourself what you would have done in that situation. There are always those occasions when you fancy yourself tough enough to take on Darth Vader, Smaug or the Borg.

Licensed roleplaying games, RPGs based on existing concepts, have grown to become a major part of the hobby. They cater not only for the wish to imagine yourself a hero in another world, but also for the desire to find yourself fighting alongside Conan, wearing The Lens or pushing back Cthulhu. On the surface, a licensed game may not seem to differ much from its regular competitors, but in the playing, a bunch of added subtleties and conventions arise.

Pros...

Part of the cool factor of roleplaying in a licensed universe is getting to use the props of your favourite milieu – "Shields Up! Lock phasers and photon torpedoes on target!" – and mixing it up with the heroes and villains you like so much – "So, Blofeld, we meet at last".

Most licensed RPGs provide you with stats for that particular world's personalities and some even encourage you to play them but, for the most part, more seasoned gamers tend to stick to the fun of creating their own character. If nothing else, it gives you the chance to do what roleplaying does best: to be your own hero and not someone else's.

From a referee's standpoint, the licensed game world presents its own share of pluses and minuses. On the upside, setting a campaign in the *Star Wars* universe can get you up and running with a minimum of explanation and mood-setting, while having to stop and describe the workings of a Gloranthan culture in *RuneQuest* can break the flow of a pacey story. Generally, players who want to play the game of the book will already be moderately knowledgeable about the subject. And here's one of the first problems.

...and Cons

If the game you're running has only a few pages of backstory in the rules and few supplements, the chances are that only the referee knows it all. But if you're playing *GURPS Uplift* with hardcore David Brin readers and you put a foot wrong, you'll find your judgements called into question. Or worse, some plot element you may have missed will surface and bring your entire scenario crashing down around your ears.

With universes as large and complex as those in *Star Trek* or the Marvel and DC comics worlds, it's not always possible to stay on top of everything and, as any referee knows, those damn players will use whatever scraps of information they can to save the day. Playing in a licensed gameworld means that sometimes the players will know more than the referee. While the players feel better because they are empowered and more in control, the referee will lose some of the ability to argue. Solving this problem is tough. While it does occur in non-licensed games, it's much more likely to crop up in licensed ones, and the 'not in my game, it doesn't' cop-out holds even less water. The only way to get around this one is to dance as fast as you can.

Case in Point

One time, when I was refereeing a *Star Trek: The Next Generation* scenario, a player using a tricorder was surprised by an armed assailant. As an important plot point, I intended to have the PC captured and held by the baddies while the other players searched for him. The gunman threatened to shoot the PC if he reached for his communicator, so the smart player showed me, using a prop tricorder, the device's emergency download button, which he could press without moving his hand.

Thus, the others were warned something was amiss and came in with phasers at the ready. I couldn't argue; the tricorder was right there in front of me. Instead I had to swiftly rework the scenario to have someone else get caught. The moral of this story is 'know more than your players, or improvise'.

"Playing in a licensed gameworld means that sometimes the players will know more than the referee."

A Hero's Limits

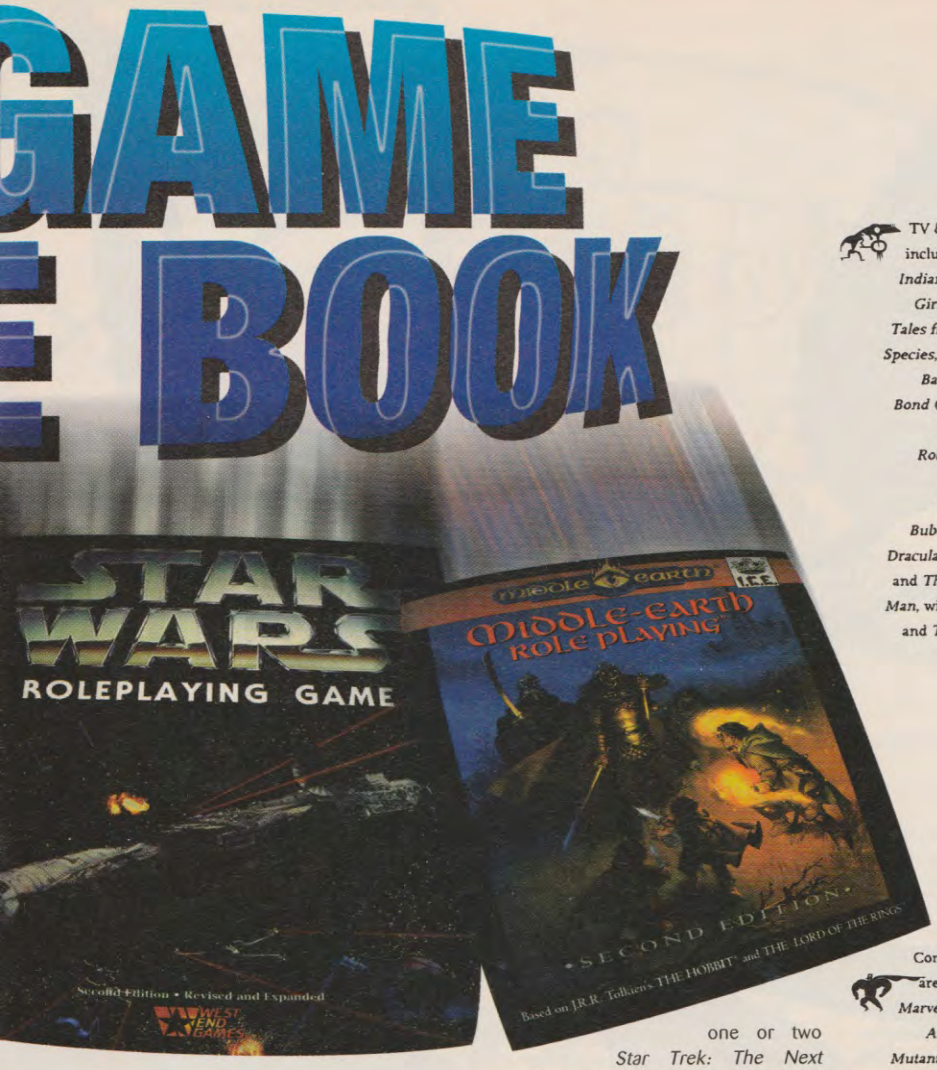
One of the more heinous devices to come out of a licensed game is the idea of script immunity – that important characters will not die, no matter how badly they screw up, because they are the heroes. So Luke Skywalker can fumble his Skyhopper Pilot roll and slam into the wall of Beggar's Canyon with nary a scratch, which pretty much chops out the thrill of taking a life-threatening risk.

The solution to this one is easy: don't play the heroes. Not only is it dull – why play Luke when you could play someone of your own devising, maybe even someone better? – it's also open to role-abuse. How many players are good enough actors to play true to the established character, week in and week out? Generally, playing star personalities only works in one-off sessions, or introductory or demonstration games. Roll your own character and you instantly have a far greater freedom to grow. What's more, this also allows the referee to kill you without losing continuity.

Sometimes a background just doesn't fly as an RPG. What may seem like a great story played on a television show falls down when turned over to a bunch of unscripted PCs, or perhaps a given setting's conventions become too restrictive. Three good examples of the latter are the *Judge Dredd*, *Star Trek* and *Doctor Who* RPGs. *Judge Dredd* is indicative of the command structure style of some games where the PCs' freedom is constrained. A Mega-City Judge can't simply drop out of sight to go doggo or perform freelance tasks like a private eye might. He has to answer to someone and account for all his actions, which is anathema to players used to more free-and-easy gaming.

In *Star Trek* you have the Captain problem; should the Captain be a PC or an NPC? Can you find a player whom the rest of the group will obey when he gives an order, even if they disagree with it? If the Captain is indecisive, or worse, incorrect, the others will find it hard to be bossed around by someone they don't

Book-based RPGs include: *Call of Cthulhu, Riverworld, Dream Park, Uplift, Ringworld, Conan, Horseclans, Humanx, Stormbringer/Elric!, When Gravity Fails, Witch World, Wild Cards, Amber, Illuminati, Hardwired, The War against the Chtorr, Lensmen* and *Middle-Earth. Robin Hood, Camelot, Pendragon, The Scarlet Pimpernel* and similar historical fiction RPGs are also available.



respect. If the Captain is an NPC, the referee instantly gets more control over the players and the gameplay may suffer as a result.

Doctor Who has a similar glitch; not everyone can be a Timelord, though it's much nicer to have the long scarf or frilly shirt than to be a screaming companion. By and large, PC parties work best as loose groups of people of similar rank, be they skills or positions of power. Gameworlds that impose a hierarchy can cause problems. The easy solution is for the referee to open up the command structure and allow a little more freedom for the PCs to move; make the Judges a special elite unit, the Starfleet officers all Cadets, or have a Tardis without a Timelord pilot. As always, a referee's greatest tool is adaptability.

Aah... Mr Bond

It's been my experience that a licensed universe game works best when the stars of the show are somewhere off-camera, making occasional cameo appearances to help or hinder the PCs through their adventures. Treating the players as if they were characters in a spin-off series is perhaps the best analogy.

Consider the early seasons of *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, which contained one or two *Star Trek: The Next Generation* crossovers but also forged their own stories. True, there's a thrill to be gained from bumping into Indiana Jones at the Temple of Chachapoya but, if it becomes commonplace, the novelty wears off. Conversely, a game such as *Call of Cthulhu* has no star personalities, with the possible exception of the baddies, who are more often set-dressing than actual direct adversaries. It concentrates on recreating the feel of the subject matter.

Working around the established characters of a given universe can be a nightmare for the referee, especially if your PCs fall victim to the gunslinger syndrome. You could find them spoiling to test their mettle against their heroes and villains, or even find the NPC personalities coming after them. If a *Star Wars* Jedi PC gets sufficiently powerful, isn't it logical that Skywalker will come looking to recruit him? How do you avoid accidentally harming personalities? – "Blow the building!" "No, wait! Captain America is still in there!" Keeping them out of harm's way is effective, but not very interesting. Alternatively, the cop-out script immunity clause can be invoked – "Phew! Lucky Cap found that lead-lined bomb shelter in the basement!" – or, if you're really daring, you can let things fall as they will – "Oh my God! America's greatest hero is dead!"

Here's an example of how to use a cameo from an adventure I ran for the *James Bond 007* RPG. The players were a trio of rookie agents tasked to escort a captured KGB spy to Finland for an exchange. After fending off a few attempts to spring him, they reached the airport only to have the spy break cover and reveal he was actually James Bond! Bond claimed to have seen two dangerous terrorists up to no good in the airport and explained that the spy swap was all just a test for the new agents. What were they to do? Was it really Bond, or was he a wily KGB spy trying to fool them? There was no time to check in with control, so the choice was theirs. The fact that it was allegedly 007 himself served only to unbalance them further. The tension of an already tough situation was dramatically heightened.

TV & Movie RPGs include: *Star Wars, Indiana Jones, Tank Girl, Doctor Who, Tales from the Crypt, Species, The Prisoner, Babylon 5, James Bond 007, Star Trek, Ghostbusters, Robotech, Aliens, Macross II, Terminator II, Bubblegum Crisis, Dracula, Project A-KO* and *The Lawnmower Man*, with *Highlander* and *The X-Files* on the way.

Among the Comic book RPGs are: *Judge Dredd, Marvel Superheroes, Albedo, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, DC Heroes* and *Buck Rogers*

Making Your Mark

Nothing will spook players more than when the continuity they expect suddenly vanishes. Imagine if Luke's X-Wing was vaped over the Death Star and it was up to a PC to make the fatal trench run. Rendering an established rigid background flexible is both a cop-out and a challenge. It is a cop-out because working inside a set framework is no easy task and it is a challenge because the referee has to make up pretty much everything from thereon in. Changing the backstory significantly can be explained away as a parallel universe, but it's generally best to make clear any changes to the players early on. Altered versions of established worlds also allow the referee to tailor the continuity to their own vision. But if you're too attached to the storyline to muck about with it, you can grant yourself some freedom by picking out an undetailed period or area in the universe's continuity; the new *Babylon 5* RPG does just that, setting its gameworld years before the start of the television series.

Players play RPGs because they want adventure and the chance to make a mark on the universe but a licensed game's universe already has its own hero. Why send you when Sir Lancelot can do the job better? The referee must be careful to consider the PCs' place in the pecking order. If a threat to the Federation calls for the intervention of Captain Kirk of the Enterprise, Captain Bateson of the Bozeman will find himself on the substitute's bench. So, instead, the referee pitches the problem to focus on the characters and not on their star-name rivals; maybe Kirk can't get there in time. It's true that they will probably never be as tough as, say, the Man Of Steel but playing in a licensed universe isn't about usurping the heroes already there. It's about standing alongside them and earning the same honours.

Licensed to Kill

How do some of the more popular licensed games fare in converting their universes into playable gameworlds?

***Star Wars* – Recently re-issued and re-vamped, West End Games' RPG is an excellent example of a licensed game, capturing the action-packed heroism of the movies with a fast-moving rules system.**

***Call of Cthulhu* – Chaosium's excellent rules come together with a truly scary background that accurately conveys the unearthly and intelligent horror of the Lovecraft stories.**

***MERP* – Coming from Iron Crown Enterprises' *Rolemaster* system, the *Middle Earth* games are very finely detailed and draw on a great knowledge of the Tolkien stories. They suffer, however, from wordy, stodgy rules and an overpowered magic system compared to the books.**

***Marvel Superheroes* and *DC Heroes* – TSR's and Mayfair's games both have simple and workable rules systems but they favour the playing of established comic book heroes over the creation of new ones and require a good familiarity with the universes to really make the most of them.**

***The Babylon Project* – The eagerly-awaited *Babylon 5* RPG provides a good basic rules mechanic to encourage non-gamer *B5* fans into the hobby, while concentrating on depth of background. However, the scope of storylines seems a little limiting at first.**

The Evolution of Game Magic

Perhaps because of its roots in wargaming, but also because it was, and remains, intended as an easy, dramatic game with an emphasis on adventuring, *Dungeons & Dragons*, the first formal RPG system, had a fairly simple magic system.

The authors found inspiration in Jack Vance's *Dying Earth* stories, where 'package' spells are ideas so powerful that a wizard can only cram a few of them into a trained brain at any time. The game's character class system then divided spells between magic-users and priests.

As a result, *D&D* magic is arbitrary, combat-oriented and not much like many stories. Some point out that magic is supposed to be arbitrary and implausible but many other people disliked the game for that and quickly started developing their own systems, usually based on 'spell points' - energy batteries that powered fixed spells that were otherwise much like those found in *D&D*.

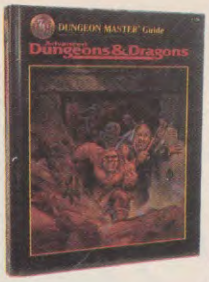
Eventually, games emerged which attempted to fit magic in with specific world views. *Chivalry & Sorcery* had systems for everything that might fit into a game world based on medieval legend.

***Runequest*, based in the spirit-haunted, cult-filled world of Glorantha, had a strong metaphysical structure. *Stormbringer* even introduced summoning magic, thanks to Michael Moorcock's books. But most new games, however interesting, stuck with 'spell lists'. Real change came from two different sources.**

First, there were superhero games, which had to simulate powerful comic book magicians and other flexible super-powers. The market leader, *Champions*, which had always used a system whereby characters spent points to buy powers, eventually developed the idea of the 'power pool' - a reserve of points which could be assigned to different powers at different times. This was a little lacking in atmosphere, especially for magical characters, unless players and referee put extra work in, but it was as flexible as high power magic should be, and the concept of some kind of 'pool' of points, dice, or whatever, is now used in many games.

Then, there was *Ars Magica*, which set out to make magic interesting and colourful. It involved a mix of spells and skills, but also introduced a rich 'verb/noun' approach to magic. Its influence on *Mage*, the current leading

complete understanding of their magic in order to conduct day-to-day magical activities.



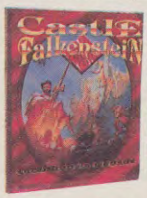
If spells are standardised, there can be various limitations on their use. For example, in *D&D*, there is the well-known 'memorisation limit' – courtesy Jack Vance. Other games assume that spell-casting draws on the magician's personal energy. Seen in this way, the use of magic is very tiring. Other limits include other finite power sources, such as 'powerstones', or the requirement that a caster employs a tricky skill in order to control the power. Before deciding which limits apply, a referee should usually decide whether the power for spells comes from outside the caster or from within.

In either case however, the spells themselves are clearly defined and magician characters will have a neat list of them on their character sheets.

The Skill of Shaping

Then again, perhaps there simply exists a force called 'magic', which some people can sense and control. 'Spells', if they exist, are techniques for shaping magic in routine ways. If magical methodology is highly formalised, this may look much like the 'packets of power' approach, but it becomes far more interesting if a magician can apply a bit of improvisation to the business. In some game worlds formalised magic is easier to make powerful than the more flexible, improvised version. This may mean that magician characters have two approaches to their work, between which they alternate. Or the situation can be used to set up conflicts between 'schools'; the hidebound, formal, hierarchical, power-obsessed 'magicians' may well disagree, on a fundamental level, with the flexible, disorganised, unpredictable, free-spirited 'witches'.

Learning magic in such a world therefore, means either mastering standard techniques, learning a general skill of 'force manipulation', or both. If the system is well designed and atmospheric, magician characters should come to see the formal part of their training as a slightly frustrating basic grounding, from which they move into more dramatic, interesting 'improvised' work based on a real understanding of the nature of the Universe.



Games using this sort of approach include *Castle Falkenstein* and *Ars Magica*. Both make wizards into eccentric scholars, presumably because they both have magic as a complex, bizarre skill. *Ars Magica* is particularly good at treating its magician characters as mad scientist types.

Another idea that is not often used in games is to have several different magical 'forces', each controlled in a different way. This could be used to set up several very different types of spell-caster character within a consistent rules framework. The nearest common approach may be to have 'magic', which usually spell-based, and 'psionics' which is more free-form but with a restricted ranges of effects.

Mastery of Spirits

Ironically, the most commonly held idea of magic throughout history is quite possibly the least common in games. This is magic as the art of summoning and controlling spirits.

Such spirits, who may be called ghosts, demons, djinn, elementals, or Loa, are traditionally invoked by special ceremonies, although powerful magicians may call them up with a few words or even by mere effort of will. Once summoned, these spirits may be controlled through spells or symbols, manipulated by appealing to their tastes, or simply persuaded by cleverness and charisma. Thus, magical effects are not performed directly by the magician but are the work of the spirits acting on the summoner's behalf.

This is an atmospheric and subtle idea but it has a huge problem from the game point of view; every magical casting becomes a complex, roleplayed encounter, in which the referee must take the part of a powerful inhuman being. Furthermore, the game world must also include a well-developed 'spirit realm', with its own hierarchies and logic. If the players like running magicians because they are powerful and impressive, the idea of them forever having to haggle can be rather irritating.

All this extra work is only likely to seem worth the effort if the campaign is actually built around this sort of magic, though many games involve a little 'summoning magic' as a specialised option. That said, when it works, it can be fascinating. It is easiest to set up such game worlds by basing them closely on real world mythology.

Good choices include Voodoo, with its houngans and pantheon of Loa, Arabian legend with its djinn, or Shinto, with its kami. In each case, the number of spirits and powers is important, but so is the array of magical and ceremonial systems for working with them.

A 'spirit magic' system can be further categorised by the types of spirits that the magician calls upon. Perhaps the oldest and most 'primitive', though also often the most complex, types are animism and shamanism. Technically, animism is the belief that the world is filled with spirits, while shamanism is a set of techniques for working with and travelling to the spirit world. For game purposes, a shaman can be defined as someone who works with nature spirits. Some of them will be fairly powerful, certainly enough so to be very dangerous, but will not actually be classed as gods. Shamans may believe in real gods but tend to think of them as too powerful to deal with.

Voodoo is based on an African animism but adds a lot of ideas borrowed from Christianity and the folk-beliefs of three continents. Modern witchcraft claims to involve a kind of animism and may thus involve dealings with nature spirits. It may sometimes have been persecuted because outsiders with a different viewpoint assumed that any negotiation with spirits had to mean dealing with the Devil.

Another sort of spirit magic deals with demonic beings from Hell or the Outer Darkness. This approach is mostly associated with stories in which the magician is the evil villain of the piece, or at best, a tragically misguided fool who is messing with beings who are bigger, and probably smarter, than they are.

"If you're concerned that the neighbours might think badly of your hobby, don't talk too much about summoning demons."

Dealing with demons is a high-risk occupation, one which involves exposing oneself to extreme temptation. A few Christian, Hebrew, and Islamic tales also suggest that it might be possible to have dealings with angelic beings but that has another problem; it's not really possible to imagine a mere mortal manipulating a being that is nothing less than a direct agent of the Will of God!

A few games have done interesting things with spirit magic. Examples include *GURPS Voodoo* and Myrmidon's *Witchcraft*, both by CJ Carella. Spells in a world with spirit magic may either be standardised summonings and bindings, or tasks which particular, well-known types of spirit can be asked to perform. Play is simplified if a good number of such spells are available but it misses the point if no summoning ever involves ceremonial activity or a bit of tricky negotiation.

In addition, there's one other possible catch with treating magic in such a traditional fashion. Some people really do believe in demons and spirits, and some of those people believe that such beings are very evil. It is hard to imagine that a roleplaying game could accidentally

"His sister hath protected him, and hath repulsed the fiends, and turned aside calamities of evil... Her tongue was perfect, and it never halted at a word. Beneficent in command and word was Isis..."
from *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*

"There are two descriptions of magic: one is spiritual and regarded by all but free thinkers as true; the other, natural, and denounced by the more religious and enlightened as deceptive."
from *Arabian Society in the Middle Ages* by Edward William Lane

"To him, the world is mostly worked by supernatural agents, that is, by personal beings acting on impulses and motives like his own, liable like him to be moved by appeals to their pity, their fears, and their hopes. In a world so conceived, he sees no limit to his power of influencing the course of nature to his own advantage..."
from *The Golden Bough* by Sir James Frazer

"...it was not what he was able to take that made magic wonderful, but the taking, the violation of another person's will, the holding of a better hand, the perception of his own will staining the landscape in all directions..."
from *On Stranger Tides* by Tim Powers

open a gateway to the Pit of Hell, but if you are concerned that your nearest and dearest, neighbours or the local media, might think badly of your hobby, try not to spend all your time talking about summoning demons.

Divine Power

The next type of magic goes one stage beyond spirit power. Invoking the power of the gods requires an entirely different approach. Instead of 'commanding" these all-powerful beings, the magic wielder has to ask nicely, because gods are just too big to boss around. This can seem terribly limiting, especially as gods tend to have lots of rules for their followers, but it can have some compensating advantages; gods can usually do almost anything.

Note that this is not the same as a system in which gods teach their priests spell-like abilities, or in which priests double up as scholarly mages; the whole point here is that the god acts directly when asked, sometimes.

However, there is a style of magic between this and spirit summoning, in which powerful deities send empowered servants to assist their followers. Spells are not usually described as such by characters using this type of magic but there might be invocations that certain gods usually notice.

Folklore also includes one other type of divine magic not much used in games. This is the study of the nature and name of the gods, or of God. Hebrew and Muslim legends are full of wise scholar–priests who accomplish great things with a few words, or by inscribing a symbol. In effect, this seems to be a type of directed prayer, using detailed religious knowledge.

Crudely put, this sounds much like spell-based magic, but the underlying rules are very different and the idea may not be easy to adapt for games; after all, it's very hard to roleplay a scholar so intelligent and insightful as to be on first name terms with God.

In any case, a referee looking to depict any sort of Divine Magic in a game has all the problems of one seeking to run a spirit magic system, only worse; gods are bigger, stranger, and generally less human than almost any spirit.

Furthermore, any rules mechanism can probably be abused: "How many Holy Relics do we have to buy to make sure that everyone in that city goes down with scurvy?" On the other hand, a game world in which deities can and do exert their power, and in which a few sanctified people – perhaps just the non–player characters – can ask for their aid, will feel far more mythical than one in which magic is like engineering.

Reality Shaping

Last comes perhaps the hardest type of magic to keep under control in a game, but also the most stylish when it's done right. Suppose magicians have a deep understanding of the nature of the universe, which they can tweak to meet their needs? Perhaps they don't even seem to cast spells at all. Perhaps stuff just happens to suit them. They control Reality itself!

This sort of magic might be simulated by a rules-light game in which the referee improvises a lot, but unless you're very skillful, you're probably going to need some well-tested rules. A few are available off the shelf, notably *Mage: The Ascension* and *GURPS Mage*.

But, as the people who play these games sometimes find, even the best rules can have problems with the concept. After all, if a character can warp the laws of nature, then how can a game have any permanent rules that apply? And what's the point of adventuring?

The answer, as adopted by *Mage*, is that reality is hard to change and tends to 'snap back'. This seems fairly logical. Presumably, the universe exists in its current form, and not any other way, for a given reason. Unless, of course, the need to have reasons is one of the aspects of reality that can be changed by the use of magic…

Game mechanics thus represent a deeper set of rules about reality, rules which cannot be changed, at least not without higher orders of magical skill. There is also the possibility that everyone, even non-wizards, may have some unconscious influence over reality. As a consequence, magic, especially in the face of cynics or philosophical opponents, has to overcome the will of the majority.

This, in one sense, is a distinctly modern view of how magic might operate. Perhaps only in the age of relativity, quantum physics and widespread atheism could anyone think that reality itself could be unreliable. On the other hand, one of the oldest ideas about magic is that a magician can control good and bad luck, and this only makes sense, in modern terms, if reality itself can be directly manipulated by the spell-caster.

In such a universe, spells are standardised ways of achieving frequently desired results. Of course, quite how anyone might standardise anything when reality is flexible is an open question.

In general, the magician must probably adopt some personal idea of reality, however arbitrary this is, and stick to it. *Mage* has a lot of fun working with this idea.

Alternatively, magicians may not so much shape reality as access different versions of it. This is the basis of Roger Zelazny's *Amber* stories and is picked up in the *Amber* RPG, which also includes skill/spell magic.

game of modern day, reality warping magic, is obvious.

Spirit-based and divine magic has developed less dramatically in games but is certainly better handled these days than it was twenty years ago. Spirits were crucial to *Glorantha*, albeit mostly to teach spells and power magical devices, and reappeared in games such as *Shadowrun*, which set out to depict shamanism. Although designers have trod carefully around sensitive themes such as religion, gamers today can pick up supplements for *Werewolf* and *Mage*, which cover spirits and the spirit worlds, or *GURPS Religion* and *GURPS Voodoo*, with their attention to the way that the supernatural is seen in the real world.

Public Views of Magic

Apart from the practical question of how wizards operate, the basic theory of magic can have another important implication for the practitioner's public image.

There is a significant difference between the way magicians have been viewed by the public over the years and their function in roleplaying. In the real world magicians have often been feared, avoided, and sometimes persecuted. In many game worlds, on the other hand, they are an accepted part of society. This is because real world magic was often, supposedly, based upon the summoning of dangerous spirits, attempts to coerce erratic deities, or the sending of ill-luck, whereas fantasy wizards are more often seen as morally neutral technicians. You may be concerned that a doctor or an electrician should do a good job but you don't usually worry that they are going to load you with seven years' bad luck, nor would you expect them to rip out your soul and sell it to Beelzebub. This is one good reason for looking at what magicians really do; to restore some terror and mystery to the business.

The more straightforward types of magic, based on spells or skills, are probably more likely to be viewed as morally neutral, although obviously, spell-casters whose workings demand, say, human sacrifice, aren't going to be so popular. If people think that magicians deal with evil spirits, they will probably get the bonfires going in short order. And reality-shapers, while not automatically seen as evil, are going to be considered really scary and probably best avoided. Those who work with neutral or benevolent spirits should be more acceptable, although a propaganda campaign that declares that those 'friendly nature-elementals' are really devious demons can do a lot of damage. Divine magic raises the stakes here; gods are usually regarded with awe and worship but wars of religion can, of course, make for complications.

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PULL OUT AND KEEP

The nineteenth in a series of collectable encounters from **arcane**

#19

the roleplaying magazine

arcane PRESENTS

The Blue Dragon Chinese Restaurant

by Ken and Jo Walton

The Blue Dragon Restaurant

Some of the most exquisite Chinese food available in the West can be found at The Blue Dragon. However, the culinary delights on offer aren't the restaurant's only attraction...

Chun's recollection of the first time Tsin-Ting and Cathy Kay came to The Blue Dragon.

All but two of the tables were taken by barbarians that evening. It isn't an ideal situation, but unless we get really popular it's the only way to make a living.

The kitchen was chaos. Su-Yin was chopping onions with his huge machete and sweeping them into a wok with expansive gestures. One of the assistants was scurrying with bowls and candles. The boss was making a sauce and screaming at the girls to get out of the way. Everyone was moving at top speed and talking at the tops of their voices. Flames leapt from a wok and narrowly avoided one of the new waiters as he headed for the stairs. He'd settle in and get used to it, or if not he'd leave. We were all family at The Blue Dragon, one way or another.

The order was ready for the barbarian couple in the corner. I picked it up and headed back up the stairs into the restaurant. The door swung shut behind me, cutting off the noise. I came around the screens with trays in both hands. In complete contrast to the chaos below, the place was calm and quiet. Soft, subtle music was playing through the speakers. I glanced at Yung-Wu over at the bar. He nodded at me, clearly bored. I made my way towards my hungry customers. The smell of the prawns in ginger was exquisite. I was just putting them down on the table when the door opened.

I glanced up. There was something about the way they walked into the restaurant that told me that these were no ordinary neighbourhood girls looking for a chop suey. The first was a blonde, smartly dressed. Her eyes and her walk suggested that she had a gun and knew how to use it. But the other was the one who caught my eye. She was a woman of the Middle Kingdom and she hadn't made any compromises. She wore a black silk jump suit and her straight, black, shoulder length hair swung loose to her jaw line. She was very beautiful. No smile creased her regular features or crinkled the corners of her almond eyes. I'd never seen her before, but there was no doubt in my mind that she meant business. Then she took another step into the room. It was the two swords crossed on her back that really let me know who she was.

Whether you come to The Blue Dragon for a meal, to investigate mysterious goings on or for a fight, you're bound to find something here worth your time and trouble.

The Clued-In Visitor's Guidebook: Eating Out

Blue Dragon Restaurant
The Blue Dragon on Lotus Street in Chinatown is a medium-priced fully-licensed restaurant with excellent food and service. It is a well established restaurant in a busy location and it is advisable to book in advance, especially for Friday and Saturday evenings in high season. The specialities of the house include Shanghai Lobster, Six Mushroom Soup and Hot and Sour Prawns. The restaurant can cater for large parties with tables that seat up to 15 people. It can be slightly cold on occasion, but is otherwise highly recommended, especially the lobster.

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From The Clued-In Visitor's Guidebook: Eating Out

The Blue Dragon Restaurant is in Chinatown, the Chinese part of any Western city in Britain, Europe or North America. All the staff and some of the customers are Chinese. The rest of the customers are natives of the country in question, locals or visitors. Some of them are regulars and some of them are people paying their first visit to the place because they saw it in the guidebook, or because it was recommended to them by a friend as having excellent food. Very few people just walk in off the street without such a recommendation because somehow, although there's nothing obviously wrong with it, the place just doesn't look too welcoming.

As you approach The Blue Dragon from the street, you see the name of the restaurant written up outside in both English and Chinese characters. It is reached via a short flight of steps from street level. These are shallow marble steps, not too difficult for anyone to negotiate. The door is noticeably at an angle and contains a small concave mirror set at head height. This may well make sensitive people feel slightly uneasy and many potential customers turn away at this point to find somewhere else to eat. If anyone asks about the door and the mirror, the staff laugh and explain that they are like that to avert bad luck.

The restaurant gets its name from the mosaic of a blue dragon, Lam-Sik-Lung, which is coiled in the tiles near the entrance. This is a large and beautiful mosaic. It is particularly striking and is sure to be noticed

The Blue Dragon

The System

From now on we will be providing you with stats to complement the character descriptions already included in Encounters, starting with this month's escapade at The Blue Dragon restaurant. In this issue we have provided stats for some of the characters in a Feng Shui *or* Call of Cthulhu *scenario, although this should not restrict the Encounter's relevance to other campaigns.*

by anyone who comes in for the first time. It is made of small tiles in more than 100 different shades of blue. The dragon is wingless, a typical curled Chinese dragon, with little flecks of blue in the tiles around it, which are somewhat ambiguous but could be water or fire. The whole restaurant is floored with grey and white tiles with occasional flecks of blue.

On either side of the door stand two four foot high black statuettes of leopards. They are identical. They have open mouths set in a snarl. The one on the left protects a hatstand, and the one on the right protects the bar. The bar serves drinks to people waiting for a table and is also where customers pay their bills. There are optics behind it serving all kinds of drinks. The music in the restaurant is controlled from here by the barman. The barman welcomes new arrivals and summons the attention of a waiter to seat them. There is an intercom down to the kitchen, and also an emergency button under the counter.

The restaurant is papered with red flecked wallpaper. The walls are hung with many pictures – Western oil paintings, Classical Chinese art, and scrolls. There is a wide range of subject matter, stretching from vases of flowers to landscapes in both Western and Chinese styles. Most of the pictures have heavy frames and are hung from hooks with cords.

There are two especially beautiful long scrolls hanging on the wall above the bar, clearly hand-calligraphed in Chinese characters. To most Westerners they will be incomprehensible. To anyone who understands Chinese the one on the left reads: 'You don't have to be mad to work here, but it helps' and the one on the right reads: 'Credit will be given to all patrons over 90 accompanied by both their parents'. The scrolls were made by Yung-Wu who is quite prepared to joke about his work to anyone who can read them, but will not translate them to anyone who cannot.

The large round tables up the middle of the room have rotating centres, suitable

the gaming magazine arcane
ENCOUNTER!
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Cathy Kay

Cathy Kay is Tsin-Ting's best friend. She is a pretty, blonde, vivacious American. She was once in the Mafia, before becoming involved with Chinese gangs in various Chinatowns around the world. Her girlfriend was kidnapped by a Triad, and she has hopes that she may still be alive to be rescued. She teamed up with Tsin-Ting in their fight against magic and evil. Cathy carries a large gun in her handbag wherever she goes. She knows how to use it and is a very accurate shot. Her choice of what to shoot may be a little unconventional however, and she suffers from a tendency to shoot first and ask questions later. She wears fashionable, modern clothes, and has come to the restaurant with Tsin-Ting to attempt to recruit Li.

In a *Feng Shui* background, she may be from the present day or might have escaped from 2056.

Quote: "Yes, this is a gun. It's my constitutional right as an American to bear arms."

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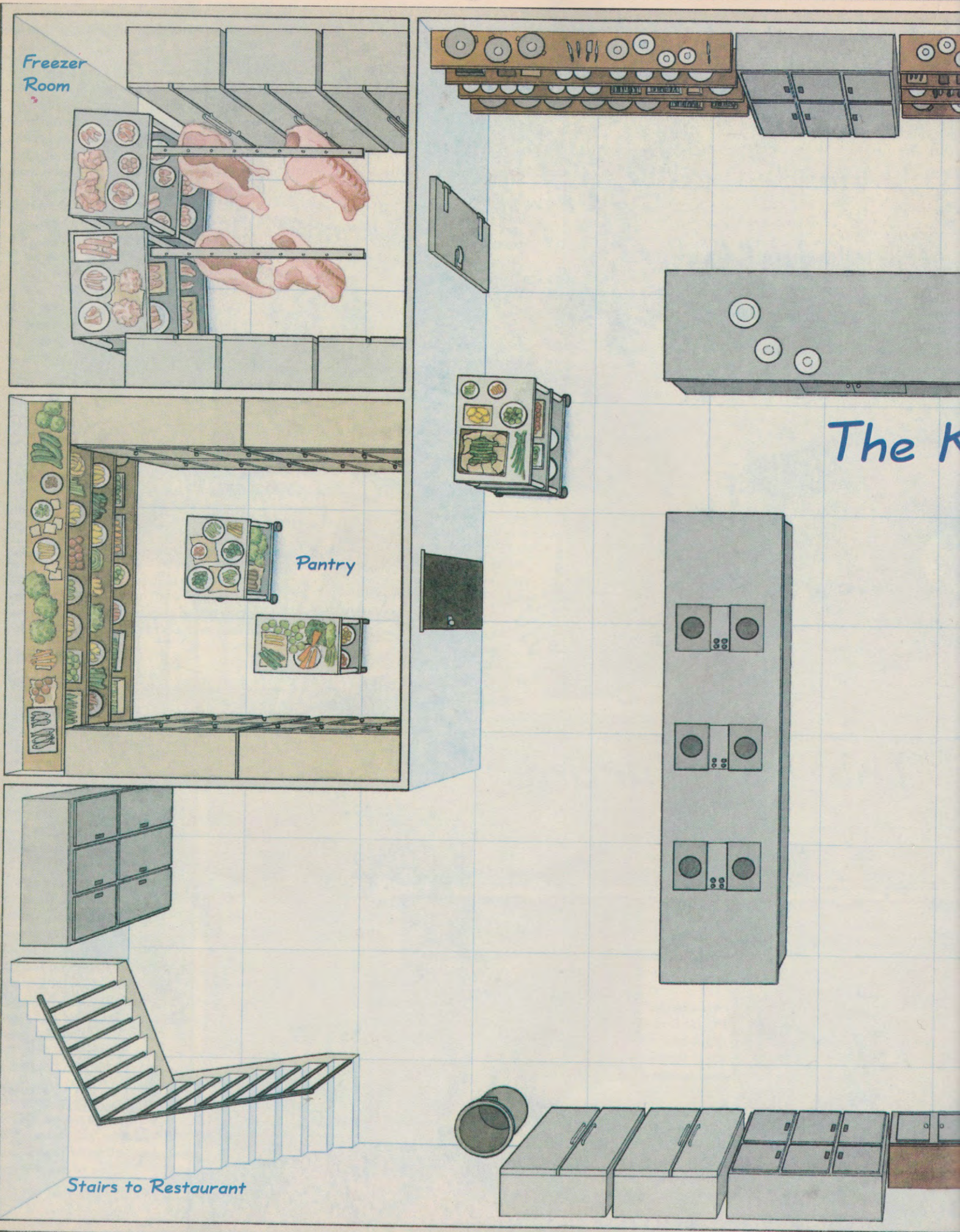

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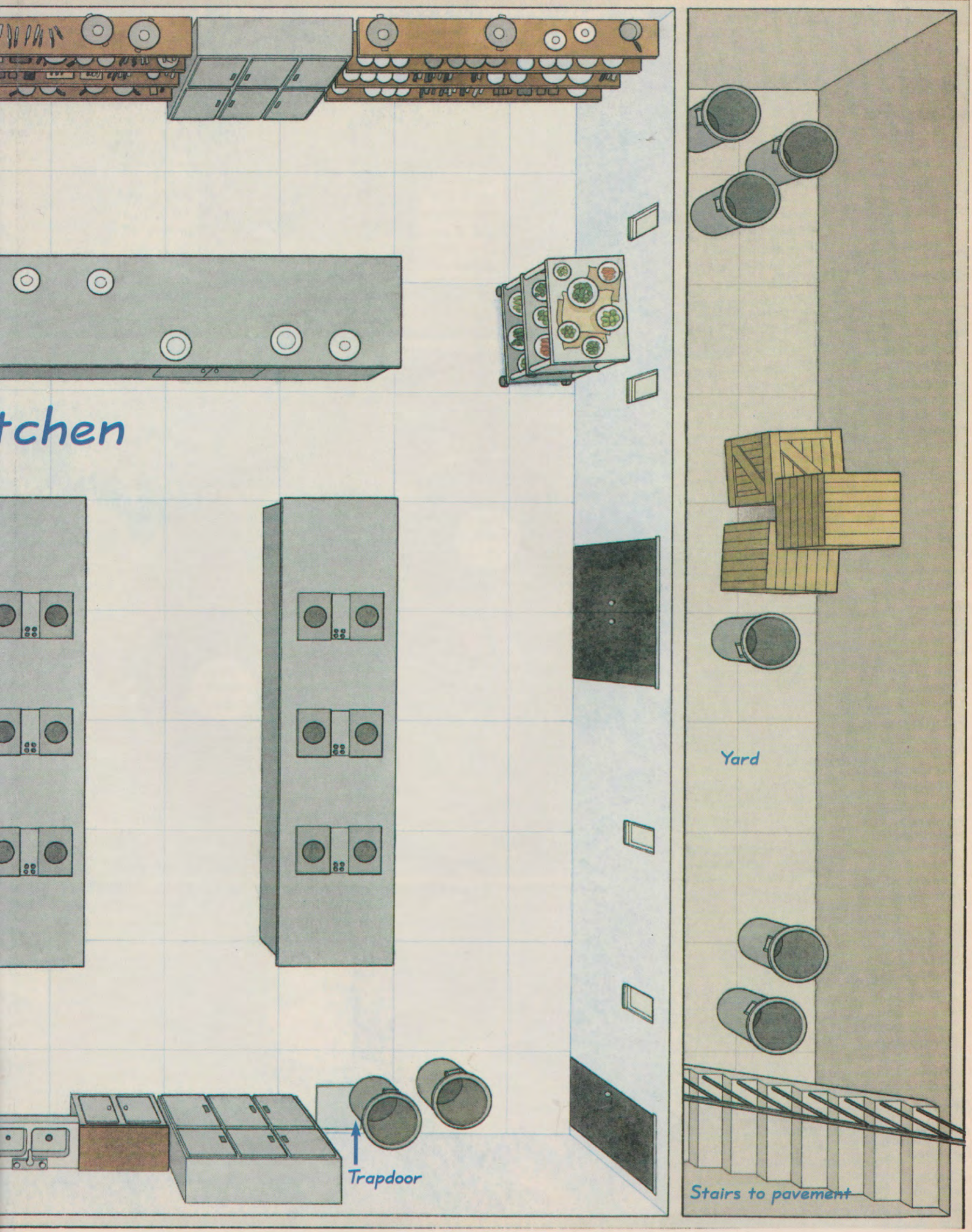
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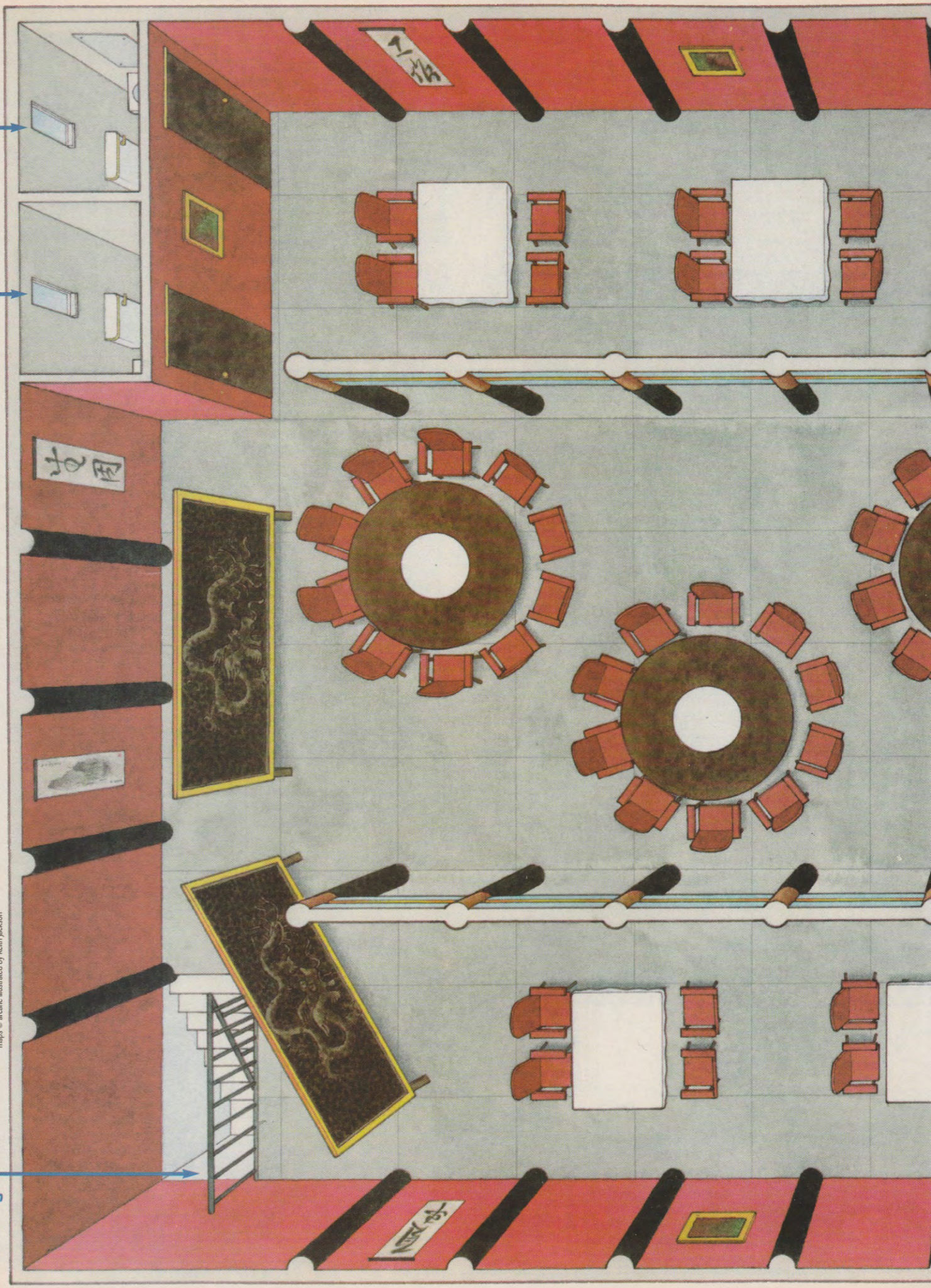

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time at least two of these are in use. The stoves are lit with gas, which can leap up high. There may be anything on top of them: pans of water, pans of boiling oil, pans containing almost live lobsters and so on. Against the other wall is a very large sink and draining board. All the washing up of The Blue Dragon is done here, by hand, and by the most junior cook's assistant. If anything is broken, Mr Wu screams loudly and berates the person who dropped the item, and may even hit them about the head with his apron.

There is also a trap door. Nobody has ever seen it open and nobody ever admits to knowing anything about it. Mr Wu says that it leads to the cellar and that it's better not to go there. In fact it leads to an ordinary dusty cellar with a camp bed where Mr Wu sleeps. There are also various doorways down there which lead to miles of passages or to the Netherworld.

The Staff

The staff of The Blue Dragon are all Chinese and have mostly been working there for years. Mr Wu, the boss, hires them all personally. Generally, the best way to get a job at The Blue Dragon is to be recommended by someone working there already, and many of the cooks and waiters are related to each other. Cooks are generally promoted to their posts when they are believed to have learned enough and there is a vacancy. Other restaurants try to hire away cooks fairly often in the hope of reproducing some of the specialities of The Blue Dragon, and are occasionally successful. Waiters remain waiters always. Again there is a reasonably high turnover of staff in this department. At any given time, there are usually four cooks in addition to Mr Wu and three or four assistant cooks. There are three waiters.

The Triads

The Triads, or Chinese gangs, are a fact of life in Chinatown. Mr Wu pays protection money to two different gangs of them to ensure that they leave him and his business in peace. Some of the staff may belong to Triads, but they don't like to talk about it to anyone. The Triads are sinister and secret criminal societies, rather like the Mafia but lacking such a strict hierarchical organisational structure.

Lam-Sik-Lung

If anyone asks about the dragon mosaic, they will be told that it is very old, from China, imported and re-assembled here especially for the restaurant. This doesn't sound very likely, but it is in fact true. Mr Wu brought the dragon from Shanghai, as a pile of tiles and the memory of how it was supposed to be assembled, and put it together himself when he bought the restaurant. It was originally on the floor of a lesser imperial palace outside Shanghai and was designed by a great wizard 600 years ago. Lung is the symbol of long life. Positioned as it is on the floor, in conjunction with the mirror on the outside of the door, it is extending Mr Wu's life indefinitely at the age he was when he re-assembled it. It is also the cause of the slightly uncomfortable feel of the restaurant. Lam-Sik-Lung is magical and alive, and can be brought fully to life in the right circumstances (see the scenario on page 47).

Rumours

Strange rumours about The Blue Dragon abound wherever people talk about the supernatural. The following 'facts' can be picked up by anyone in Chinatown, whether the party has any reason to be thinking about The Blue Dragon or not:

"Mr Wu doesn't look a day older now than he did when he started the business some 50 years ago."

"Actually, that was his father, they just look alike. Old Mr Wu died and this is a different man."

"There's something creepy about the building, it's unsettling in there, it's cold and uncomfortable."

"The door's been adjusted for the Feng Shui, but it still doesn't feel right."

"Positioning the door like that should actually make the atmosphere in the restaurant worse, not better."

"There's something funny about the dragon on the floor."

"There have been lots of strange happenings recently at The Blue Dragon."

"There have been three burglaries at the restaurant in recent months, and waiter Li beat them all off."

Li

Li is a Chinese waiter with a mysterious past. He has been working at The Blue Dragon for a year, while hiding from his nemesis. He is a tall, strong man of almost six foot and is very good in a fight, having many extraordinary skills in Oriental martial arts. Li has proved this several times with intruders, burglars and other mysterious strangers who might either have come looking specifically for him, or might just have been unknown people who appeared by coincidence. Although appearing to be very intelligent, Li rarely talks much to anyone. He wears a long pigtail, waiter clothes, and an inscrutable expression. He escaped from China, or somewhere more mysterious, and never talks about his home. Li does not know about Lam-Sik-Lung, nor any of Mr Wu's secrets.

In a *Feng Shui* background, Li has escaped from the Buro future of 2056 into the present, where he spent some time helping the Jammers in their fight against the Architects. Then he decided he didn't like the Jammers either, and has since been trying to live quietly without attracting attention, and has been eliminating any threats the Jammers send against him.

On the other hand, in a *Call of Cthulhu* game Li is just someone with an extremely mysterious past.

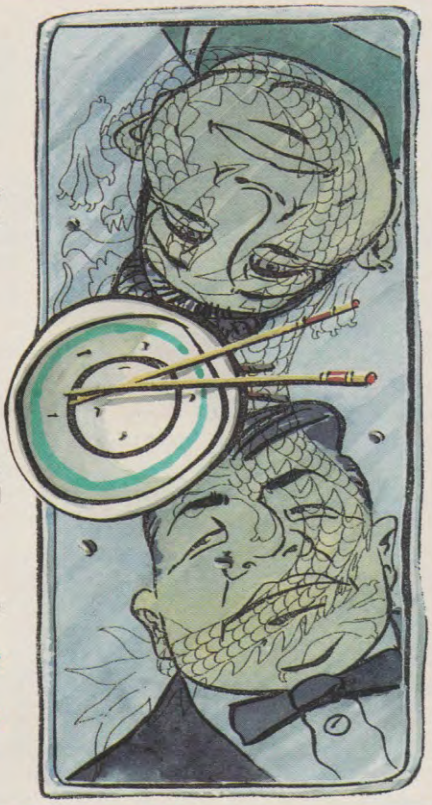
Quotes: "Boiled rice, or fried rice, sir?"

"I've put the past behind me, now it's time to concentrate on the future."

Chun

Chun is a young Chinese waiter, recommended to Mr Wu by Su-Yin, who met him wandering around the market and made friends with him. He says this is the first job he's ever had, but in fact he is a member of a Triad and is trying to infiltrate the restaurant as a first step towards taking it over. Chun is also an apprentice magician who knows a few fairly simple spells. He has recognised Lung for what it truly is and told his masters, who are very interested indeed. Although Chun undoubtedly knows how to handle himself in a brawl, he deals with most bad situations by creating a mist and getting away in the confusion. Born in Chinatown he speaks good colloquial English. Chun has been told to create a disturbance and call in the Triads, who are waiting outside.

Quotes: "Let me check the number of that on the menu, madam."
"I'm new here actually, and it's my first job. Let me ask Yung-Wu over at the bar for you, sir."



"The Triads aren't happy because the place isn't making enough money."

"The food's good but the atmosphere's awful. Take your boss, but definitely not your boyfriend."

Feng Shui

Mr Wu and Yung-Wu are wizards, but are not aligned with any faction. Waiter Li is fleeing from the Buro, and also from his erstwhile friends the Jammers. Tsin-Ting and Cathy are with the Guiding Hand, though rather more freelance than the Guiding Hand prefers. They want to recruit Li. The scenario deals with a struggle to control the Feng Shui site of the restaurant, as well as the powerful force of Lam-Sik-Lung.

Call of Cthulhu

Mr Wu and Yung-Wu are wizards. Waiter Li is fleeing a mysterious life in China, and Tsin-Ting and Cathy are pursuing him. Now they have found Lam-Sik-Lung, they will try to summon this ancient Chinese power which is every bit as dangerous as a Great Old One. The amount of fighting in the scenario should be toned down a fair bit for *Call of Cthulhu* scenarios and the amount of investigating should be increased. The Orientals are also a good deal more inscrutable, and their pasts and motivations appropriately more mysterious.

Feng Shui

MR WU
Attributes: Bod 5, Chi 2 (Mag 9), Mnd 8, Ref 6
Skills: Info/Chinatown 7, Leadership 8, Sorcery 10
Magic Schticks: Heal, Summoning

YOUNG WU
Attributes: Bod 4, Chi 1 (Mag 6), Mnd 6 (Cha 7), Ref 6
Skills: Martial Arts 7, Sorcery 7
Magic Schticks: Blast, Heal

WAITER LI
Attributes: Bod 7, Chi 0, Mnd 7, Ref 8
Skills: Info/Buro 10, Martial Arts 10

CHUN
Attributes: Bod 6, Chi 2 (Mag 5), Mnd 7, Ref 6
Skills: Guns 7, Info/Gangland 8, Sorcery 7
Sorcery Schticks: Weather

TSIN-TING
Attributes: Bod 8, Chi 0 (Fu 10), Mnd 7, Ref 9
Skills: Martial Arts 15, Info/Martial Arts 11, Leadership 7
Fu Schticks: Signature weapon x 2 (swords), Prodigious Leap

CATHY KAY
Attributes: Bod 5, Chi 0, Mnd 6, Ref 5
Skills: Guns 8, Driving 8

Call of Cthulhu

MR WU, CHINESE SORCERER
STR 12, CON 14, SIZ 13, INT 15, POW 17, DEX 11, APP 11, EDU 14, SAN 41, HP 13
Damage Bonus: +1D4
Weapons: Fist 25%, 1D3+db
Skills: Accountancy 75%, Cthulhu Mythos 21%, Occult 61%
Spells: Any suitable spells at Keeper's discretion

YOUNG WU, OCCULT WAITER
STR 14, CON 14, SIZ 10, INT 13, POW 14, DEX 13, APP 16, EDU 13, SAN 65, HP 12
Weapons: Fist 70%, 1D3, Martial Arts 65%, 2D3
Skills: Dodge 65%, Cthulhu Mythos 5%, Occult 52%,
Spells: Any suitable spells at Keeper's discretion

Tsin-Ting

Tsin-Ting, the Moon Angel is a Chinese adept of the swords. She is a beautiful woman who wears a black silk jump suit and a pair of large swords crossed on her back. Long ago, her lover was killed in the fight against evil Chinese eunuch magicians, and since then she has been trying to avenge him. She knows people who know Li, and has come to The Blue Dragon looking for him with the thought of recruiting him to help her. Having found the restaurant, she will not stop until Lam-Sik-Lung is woken or destroyed. Whether that destroys Mr Wu or not is irrelevant to her. In a *Feng Shui* background she comes from 69AD and is a member of the Guiding Hand. In *Cthulhu* she's a fanatic who knows people who know Li and hates magic. Sometimes she carries her swords in a suitcase, but often she wears them.

Quote: "Tell me what's going on."

Yung-Wu

Yung-Wu is no relation of Mr Wu, but has been working in the restaurant for ten years now. A Chinese man in his 30s, he generally wears typical waiter clothes, and spends most of his time behind the bar serving drinks. He knows some magic and is trying to attune himself to Lam-Sik-Lung by means of the decorative scrolls above the bar. The writing on the front are jokes, but on the back they have other characters with Yung-Wu's name and intentions. These have the effect of making the restaurant seem more unfriendly than ever. Yung-Wu has a joking manner and is quite Westernised. He speaks good English, is married to a woman from Hong Kong and has children whose photographs he carries in his wallet. If attacked, he can defend himself either by magic or by Oriental martial arts.

Quote: "The scrolls? Yes, I made them. Don't tell any Europeans what they say, though!"

Su-Yin

Su-Yin is a cook. She's in her 40s, cross-eyed, fat, cheerful and probably the best Chinese cook in the West. Su-Yin has been Mr Wu's chief cook for five years, and he has taught her many of his culinary secrets, but no magic. Before she left Hong Kong she cooked in the Floating Jumbo, a restaurant in the harbour of Aberdeen on Victoria Island. She loved Hong Kong, but her husband insisted that they find a new life in the West. Su-Yin gossips and will chat to anyone who speaks Chinese and also to anyone who impresses her, even if they only speak English. She knows nothing about any sinister goings on, except the Triads, which she won't talk about.

Quote: "Over here, they think anyone with the sense to leave China knows how to cook real Chinese food. Harumph!"

Scenario Seeds

Getting Involved

The PCs should have some reason to be in The Blue Dragon Restaurant. They could be there simply to eat, or because they have heard rumours about something strange going on, or they could be there to meet someone. The food is good, but there's a strange coldness in the air.

If the party needs to be directly involved, maybe the other Triads who are being paid protection could hire the party to discover what Chun is doing. Otherwise Tsin-Ting and Cathy could hire them as bodyguards. Or Mr Wu could hire them because he's worried about the Triads.

Investigating

There is a lot that can be discovered about the restaurant before anything happens. Su-Yin will talk to anyone, Mr Wu will be interested in meeting anyone who has, or claims to have, Chinese magic books for sale. Yung-Wu might make friends with anyone making the same claim, especially if they really have experience with magic. A lot of strange things have happened in the last year since Waiter Li started working at the restaurant.

Attack of the Moon Angel

When Tsin-Ting and Cathy come into the restaurant, everyone pays attention. They just aren't the kind of people you can ignore. Tsin-Ting orders lobster. Cathy orders plain white rice. She's dieting. When Tsin-Ting's lobster arrives, she draws one of her swords and uses it to split the lobster in half, then starts to eat. Some patrons giggle, others try not to stare. As soon as she gets the chance, she beckons Li and talks to him. He looks terribly worried. She is in fact trying to recruit him, and he is saying no. The PCs should watch this, but have no reason to do anything.

At this point Chun decides to start a disturbance, and attacks the women, calling out to summon the Triad. Lots of thugs rush in from the street and start laying about them. The shout of 'Triad!' is heard. This will start a general brawl, during which most patrons will hide under the tables, but which the PCs may see as a good opportunity to trash the restaurant. The turning table tops, hot plates, food and pillars should make this an interesting experience. If Yung-Wu gets the chance, he will press the emergency button, summoning help from below. If the Triads appear to be winning, Yung-Wu will bring the two china leopards to life. They will fight like real leopards, but will suffer injury just like china, splintering and breaking with the same fragility. The women will fight the Triads. Li will try to flee through one of the toilet windows, and then down into the kitchen.

Fighting in the Kitchen

The kitchen is a dangerous place. Almost everything in the kitchen is an improvised weapon, from the sides of frozen meat to the pans of hot oil, not to mention the racks of plates and knives. Mr Wu will fight using magic, Su-Yin will improvise from things lying around. Her weapon of choice is the large meat cleaver. The thugs may also pick up things like this, and someone should bring the shelves crashing down with a shattering of delicate porcelain. The fight should spread all over, with any thugs left alive eventually leaving through the back door and up the steps.

Time to Talk

The women want to recruit Li, may well want to recruit the PCs by this time, and want to control Lam-Sik-Lung. Mr Wu will not be happy, but he won't be ready to tell the truth either. The women will retreat, probably taking the PCs with them. The PCs may be horrified at this point to hear Tsin-Ting discussing how to wake up the dragon. She and Cathy will have plans for this, and will not listen to any counter-argument. They will then lose the PCs if they object.

The PCs may decide to go back to the restaurant and offer their help to Mr Wu, especially if they haven't yet realised that he's a wizard. Or they may decide to talk to Li. Neither Li nor Mr Wu will tell them the whole truth, but they will be friendly towards the PCs if they fought for the restaurant against the Triads. The PCs have a good chance to investigate at this point. Mr Wu may offer to hire them for protection against the women, or he may ask them to help him repair the restaurant and guard the dragon. There isn't any right and wrong side at this point. If any of them work out where Li is from, he will admit it, but say that he is trying to live a quiet life now and only use his skills in self defence.

Waking the Dragon

If the PCs agree to guard the restaurant, nothing will happen for a night or two, except that they spend an uncomfortable time trying to sleep in a cold, eerie place. They should eventually decide to sleep in the kitchen. They may discover that the scrolls are making things worse, and may discover Mr Wu's less than altruistic use of the dragon for his own purposes.

Whatever the PCs decide to do at this point, Tsin-Ting will try to wake Lam-Sik-Lung and take control of the site. She will do this by creeping in at night and performing a ritual, then striking the mosaic with Lady Justice. Ideally, she should get at least part way through this before being interrupted. She could either achieve this by putting the PCs to sleep, or by doing it when they are sleeping in the kitchen.

Both Mr Wu and Yung-Wu will try to stop her, and so will Li. This could turn into a straight fight between the men, the PCs and the women, or Cathy could try to hold them all off at gunpoint while Tsin-Ting finishes the ritual, thus ending up with a finale fight between a swordswoman, a gun moll and a Chinese Dragon on one side, two wizards, a kung fu expert and the PCs on the other. This should be roughly evenly matched. How Lam-Sik-Lung will act very much depends. In *Feng Shui,* he is an elemental spirit. He will be angry with Mr Wu for binding him, and grateful to Tsin-Ting for freeing him, but he will be neither in an excessive amount. His strongest desire is to be free and to live for himself now. In *Call of Cthulhu,* he is an ancient power who will not care about any of them and might choose to destroy them all as he leaves, or may not even care to do as much as that.

INSPIRATIONAL READING

Dragon's Fin Soup by S P Somtow,
Noble House by James Clavell.

Other Ideas

Getting a Job at The Blue Dragon

Only ethnic Chinese characters need apply, but Mr Wu might well take on a new assistant cook. They would, naturally, be expected to do all the washing up, but this would be a good way to infiltrate the restaurant. Having the rest of the party go there for a delicious meal while the one Chinese person spends the evening washing up might be considered too cruel, and the referee should perhaps give that person some real clues as a reward for trying hard.

Taking over the Restaurant

If Mr Wu is killed and the party members inherit the restaurant, and the dragon, as a Feng Shui site, they will be able to attune to it and use it to keep them young, as long as they never leave the premises, or they may simply use it as an ordinary site. Su-Yin will stay on as cook and manager, if they treat her at all politely.

Dragons in the Soup

A recipe with a special ingredient draws people flocking to this small restaurant, but what is this strange effect it is having on them? Is it addictive? Is it turning them into vampires? Or mutants? Or is it just especially delicious?

Through the Trapdoor

The trapdoor could lead anywhere – into a dungeon, into the Netherworld, direct to China, or into the lair of a strange cult.

"The club's aims should be practical and achievable."

Join the club

When your gaming enthusiasm exceeds the size of your living room table, it's time to set up your own gaming club. Alan Neill has some essential advice on how to make your society a success.

So, your gaming group has expanded beyond the limits of your living room or bedroom, or perhaps you're part of a group with a common desire – a crusade even – to bring out gaming to the world. Whatever the reason, you have decided to form a gaming club, but now you're looking for some advice about how to get one up and running. Well, now's the time to take the initiative because in this article we'll look at the nuts and bolts of creating and organising a successful gaming club.

Why Bother?

Starting a club can vastly expand the gaming opportunities in your area. You will find referees for games you always wanted to play and players for your own games. You can expand your skills as a referee, learning new tricks of the trade and indulging in new styles of gaming you have learned from others. From the social point of view, you have a chance to discuss games with others without getting looks of incredulity as you describe how Muldrake finished off the High Priest he had been so relentlessly tracking.

If there isn't yet anywhere in your area for gamers to meet, you still needn't be denied these benefits; setting up a club and watching it expand is a very satisfying experience. However, you will need to focus on exactly what you hope to achieve with your club, so a 'vision statement' of your aims and objectives is a good idea; formalising your club's reason for being ensures it won't become an ego trip for a few individuals.

The club's aims should be practical and achievable. Don't immediately launch into starting a huge convention or paying for a large venue before you know how many people you are going to attract. Establishing a new club takes a great deal of time and effort. Publicity is everything. You must leave flyers at local hobby shops to gauge the level of interest, but don't think this will guarantee you members.

It is also a good idea to have a newsletter to let people know what's happening at the club and on the local gaming scene. Make sure someone takes responsibility for putting it together and getting it out on time, and that they appreciate the amount of effort and commitment that will be involved.

Satanist slurs will inevitably arise. Make sure you're well versed in all the arguments in favour of gaming.

Roleplaying, like any other hobby, can attract 'characters'. Do not be bullied into letting them have the first shout every time.

"Several groups of gamers can sound like Old Trafford on a Saturday afternoon."

Finding a Venue

You're going to need a room, somewhere to game. I've seen gaming groups set up in scout halls, church halls, pubs, clubs, student unions, halls of residence, leisure centres, sports clubs, libraries and cafés. You may already have identified a venue, but before you jump headlong into staking your claim on a location, there are a few things that you need to do.

First off, make sure you have permission to use the place. Gaming can, as we all know, be a noisy pastime. If other people want a quiet drink while 'Malwort the Never Dying' screams his blood-curdling death chant, somebody will complain. Don't just get a nod and a wink, make sure you have written confirmation, or some sort of formal permission from whoever is in charge of your location. Pubs are easy, ask the landlord. For church halls, ask your local clergyman. For libraries the senior librarian will have to be persuaded.

Also find out exactly when you have access to the venue. There's no point turning up at the church hall on a Friday night when the local scouts are meeting there.

Bear in mind that almost no location is without its problems. Student unions may not look favourably upon non-students, bars may not want minors on the premises, while church halls may wish noise levels to be kept at an acceptable level. Indeed the noise level may even upset other gamers. If your club is successful, you may find that several groups of gamers engaging in a verbally focused hobby can sound like Old Trafford on a Saturday afternoon.

You also need to be clear about exactly what is expected by the venue owners. Will you have to pay for the room? If you do have to pay, establish how this is to be done. You may wish to collect money from people on a weekly basis and pay as you play, or perhaps you will have subs and make a one-off payment. Is smoking allowed at the venue? How often will the club be able to use the venue, and what will happen if anyone else wants to use it on your gaming night? Even seemingly minor

points, such as who is responsible for the removal of rubbish, will have to be sorted out; you'd be surprised at the volume of junk food wrappers and empty drinks cans gamers leave in their wake.

Tables are vital for gaming. Ensure that there are enough for everyone. If there aren't, use fold-away tables, but someone will need to agree to provide and transport them. Furthermore, dirty tables are a problem. There's nothing worse than watching a D20 stick in the centre of a beer stain, so table coverings are well worth considering.

Day One

The first night of a club is vital for its success. Perhaps you may even have a formal 'first night' every year. This is common for university clubs. Well ahead of time, make sure you have enough referees to cope with your expected intake. This also ensures people have a chance to prepare scenarios. Have a wide variety of games so that people can participate in games they want to play.

You will need to accommodate people who are new to gaming by explaining the concept to them. Game systems without intricate game mechanics are a good idea. Games should also be visually attractive. Break out the gaming props, set up a board game or two and, if table space allows, set up a wargame. This will encourage people to stay and look around, and may even bring in people off the street. There's nothing like a good display to catch people's interest.

If more people arrive than expected, the board games can fill the gap and 'sub-commanders' may control a few figures at the wargame table. If you get fewer people than expected, spread the players around. This might be an opportunity in disguise as games with fewer players allow referees to lavish more time on new members. A trick for attempting to gauge the number of new members is to leave a memo at a local hobby shop where you can inform people where and when your club will have its first night and ask them to sign up for it. You should also list the games you're planning to play.

Committees and Constitutions

You may wish to consider putting together a committee for your club. This will allow for the demarcation of tasks so that everyone knows who's meant to be booking the venue, organising games, collecting fees and so on.

A committee is not a vehicle for egos. Instead, those on the club committee should strive to represent the views of the membership and have the ability to interact effectively with other committee members. This is, after all, a co-operative operation. You will also need to consider how committee members are selected. An open election once a year works well. If you are charging a membership fee to buy library items or pay for a venue, you will need a bank account. This is easy and free to set up. While a treasurer will be responsible for keeping the books, it is a very good idea to have two signatories for the account to make sure that no one can make off with the money. Ideally, a financial statement should be given to members, perhaps on a monthly or yearly basis. Members like to know that their money is being put to good use and that it is not lining someone's pockets.

If you have a library, then you need someone to act as librarian. If you can't, store items at your gaming venue, then the person in charge there will have to look after it. A full list of items should be regularly given to members and they should be asked what new items they would like in the library. A system of signing items in and out should be maintained so that a given item can easily be tracked down in the event of someone claiming ignorance as to its whereabouts. You may also have to consider making rules about what to do if an item does go missing or becomes seriously damaged.

When your club gets off the ground and begins meeting on a regular basis, the inevitable will happen; members will make suggestions, and criticisms and also complaints, and they will expect something to be done about them. Many people feel that a constitution is only a set of rules allowing someone to play bossy-boots. This is not the case. Constitutions ensure fairness and state the mechanisms by which suggestions, criticisms and complaints can be dealt with. Some red tape may start to stick, but you will be less likely to have a clique-ridden, egocentric and, inevitably, chaotic club.

Keeping the Club Alive

Advertising your club and keeping your existing members happy are the keys to a successful club. Ensure you have a variety of games and that there is always space for new members.

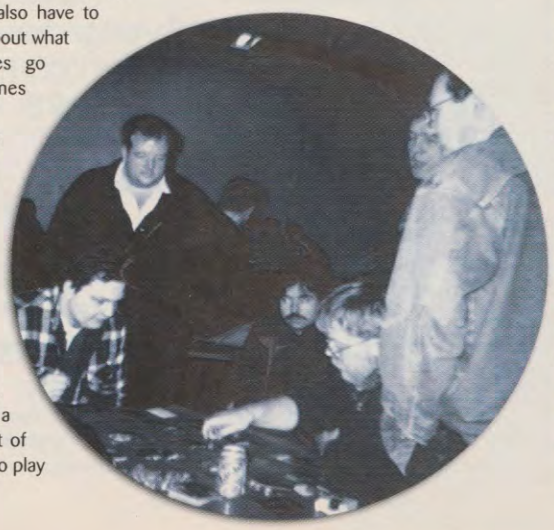
One of the most successful exposure methods is to put a poster up in the local games store. You can also advertise in the gaming press. For example, **arcane** has a free reader ads page and many newspapers have a 'What's Happening?' section. The growing virtual world of the Internet also provides an excellent medium for promoting your club if you have access to it. The **arcane** website has a roleplaying contact page, as do many other sites. Be prepared for queries from well outside your local area, however.

Despite all this info technology, though, word of mouth is still the most persuasive of contact methods. Where gamers meet, they talk. So, encourage your members to talk to others, at the local gaming shop, at conventions (take cards and flyers), and on the street.

And Finally...

Gaming clubs are fun places. There is a synergy when large groups of gamers get together. They are places where you can broaden your gaming horizons, make friends and play those games you just have to tell everyone you know about.

At the very least, you have access to players and referees you may not otherwise have met. Take the time to organise a venue, lay down the rules and promote your club and it will prove a great success.



Problems and Solutions

Be aware that gaming 'cliques' often exist. It is a natural tendency for gamers to huddle into their own small gaming groups and not interact with other groups. This doesn't do much for club spirit, but people want to play with their own groups and don't take kindly to being told that they can't. Counter this by occasionally organising mass participation events. LARPs are excellent for this, as are grand scale wargames.

Forceful personalities can also be a problem. Roleplaying, like any other hobby, can attract, ahem, how shall I put this? 'characters'. They think they have the divine right to bully people into doing what they want, threaten hell fire and damnation if they don't get their way, and generally make a nuisance of themselves.

Always treat the members of your club courteously, no matter how much they annoy you. Smile. Do not be bullied into letting them have first dibs on library items, or let their huffy tantrums destroy club events. Only if they contravene club rules should you consider action. You'll just have to learn to put up with them.

The moral minority 'satanist' slurs will inevitably arise, and there's nothing the press like better than a good scare story.

Make yourself well versed in the arguments. Pages have already been written on how to cope with such confrontations. In my experience, having a calm, intelligent and articulate person answer questions, whether it be on TV, radio or newspapers, is the best response.

The furore will eventually calm down. If you're using the local church hall, have a clergy person watch or participate in a game; they can then be cited as an advocate in any interviews or other inquisitions which might otherwise result in your being burned at the stake for your heresy.

DECKOE

PART 2: THE HEAVY HITTER DECK

In this month's installment **Jason Nicoll** *examines the big-creature deck, and the effect that the release of 5th Edition has upon it.*

MONO GREEN – CRITTER RESET

CREATURES
4 Stampeding Wildebeests
2 Yavimaya Ants
3 Wall of Roots
4 Elvish Archers
4 River Boa
3 Giant Spider

SPELLS
4 Moss Diamond
4 Creeping Mold
4 Giant Growth
2 Hurricane
2 Sylvan Library
2 Seedling Charm

LANDS
3 Thawing Glaciers
19 Forest

THE SIDEBOARD
4 Uktabi Orangutan
2 Tranquil Domain
2 Whirling Dervish
2 Nevinyrral's Disk
3 City of Solitude
2 Hurricane

Like the Weenie decks discussed last issue, the 'Heavy Hitter Engine' uses sheer speed to overwhelm an opponent before he or she gets a chance to develop. Unlike the Weenie decks, which spread investment throughout lots of cheap, fast creatures, the 'Heavy Hitter Deck Engine' focuses on producing a few large, hard to deal with threats and then providing extra support for them.

At its crudest level, a 'Heavy Hitter' deck uses fast mana to summon a BFC (Big Creature) to cause problems for the opponent and dominate the territory (the play area). Typically a 'Heavy Hitter' deck uses either Green (because of the Elves) or Black (using Dark Ritual and Mana Vault to great effect) with a splash of another colour to provide support to the theme.

The problem with the basic strategy of the 'Heavy Hitter Engine' is if the BFC is removed from play by an equally fast creature removal spell (Swords to Plowshares, Terror) or disabled by a creature enchantment (Paralyse, Pacifism or the rightly dreaded Control Magic).

If this happens, the 'Heavy Hitter' deck suffers greatly because its momentum has been spent and recovery becomes very difficult. However, most modern 'Heavy Hitter' tournament decks have themes designed to detract from this problem and have wisely substituted the fast mana and speed element for greater control, so that they're more stable.

Evolution of Heavy Hitter through '96

Many deck engines went through an enormous maturing process throughout 1996 due to the increased credibility given to the Type II scene, the influence of the Internet and the effects of the Pro Tour. Due to its massive exposure, one of the most affected engines of all was the 'Heavy Hitter'.

Classic Heavy Hitter Decks

There have been many tournament deck types that have the 'Heavy Hitter Engine' at their core. These include the infamous 'Erhnageddon', 'Erhnam 'n' Burn 'em' and 'Good Stuff' decks, as well as the more modern 'Untouchables' decks that started to emerge towards the tail end of '96. It is interesting to note that each one has successfully fused elements from other deck engines to help complement their respective themes.

Erhnageddon: This was one of the most famous decks in Magic. It was clearly a top tier deck and managed to balance its offensive (mainly Green), defensive (mainly White) and reset cards (Armageddon and Wrath of God) with ease. I wouldn't know where to start to list the impact that this deck had upon the tournament scene.

Erhnam 'n' Burn 'em: This deck came to prominence mid-1996. It was a close relative of the 'Erhnageddon' deck but used fewer defensive measures, instead opting for more aggressive creatures and Direct Damage. It wasn't exactly what you might have called a subtle deck.

The Good Stuff: This deck was popularised by George Baxter at the first Pro Tour in New York. Its basic premise was to use the best of Black and Red (with a splash of Green for Erhnam Djinn). Unfortunately, variants on this deck are unlikely to emerge because 26 of the 60 cards

ENGINES

within the deck are no longer available for Type II play, mainly because they were widely held to be too abusive.

Untouchables: This deck emerged at the tail end of '96 using non-targetable Green critters (Deadly Insects, Jolrael's Centaur and Autumn Willow) as well as the difficult-to-kill Wildfire Emissary. It really was a hybrid of the 'Erhnageddon' and 'Erhnam 'n' Burn 'em' decks. However, it's worth mentioning because it perfectly illustrates how deck themes evolve to take advantage of changes to the play environment.

Changes to the Heavy Hitter

Because it has become a familiar theme at tournaments, any new 'Heavy Hitter' deck must be versatile and have the following capabilities:

Land Destruction
Creature Control
Artifact Removal
Enchantment Removal
Efficient BFCs

Each colour has strengths and weaknesses that need to be addressed in a 'Heavy Hitter' deck. The following table illustrates the deliberate weaknesses in some colours to deal with certain situations:

	Land Destruction	Creature Control	Artifact Removal	Enchantment Removal	Efficient BFCs
Black	✔	✔	✗	✗	✔
Blue	✗	✗	✗	✗	✔
Green	✔	✗	✔	✔	✔
Red	✔	✔	✔	✗	✔
White	✔	✔	✔	✔	✗

What makes a suitable BFC?

It is no surprise that the best BFCs for a 'Heavy Hitter' deck need to be both cheap and efficient relative to their casting cost. However, they also need to have a degree of durability against targetable creature control cards (especially Terror, Dark Banishing, Incinerate and other Direct Damage).

A BFC should therefore have a toughness of at least four (unless its un-targetable) to be Incinerate proof. Unfortunately, there are very few Black BFCs that don't suffer from unreasonable upkeep costs and even fewer BFCs with Protection from Black (such as Scalebane Elite). This leaves the critters that are either un-targetable, that can Blink (Blinking Spirit, Phelddagrif) or have Controlled Phasing (Teferi's Honor Guard, Rainbow Efreet) as the top candidates.

Other critters worth considering are those that have an ability that makes them particularly difficult to kill, have a useful ability or that simply have a great power to casting cost ratio. Unfortunately, *5th Edition* has removed (and didn't really replace) some of these excellent BFCs namely Mahomotti Djinn, Erhnam Djinn, Serra Angel and Sengir Vampire. However, both *Mirage* and *Visions* contained some worthy candidates:

Scalebane's Elite
NecroSavant
Bull Elephant
Maro
Stampeding Wildebeests
Ogre Enforcer
Hulking Cyclops
Wildfire Emissary

There are also some interesting cards such as Creeping Mold, Elven Cache, Rowen, Tithe and City of Solitude which could fit quite nicely into a 'Heavy Hitter' Deck.

Red/ Green/White – Untouchables (Elliott Ness)

Most of the critters in this deck fall under the loose definition of untouchables. Maro, however, is one of the best value critters currently available in the game especially when combined with Undiscovered Paradise and Thawing Glaciers which return to the owner's hand.

Using the un-targetable critters reduces the threats to the BFC, leaving the player to be concerned only about blocking critters and mass creature destruction spells (especially Wrath of God, Earthquake, Savage Twister and to some degree Rock Slide).

Obviously, the Direct Damage element of the deck should help to control the territory and remove any potential blockers. Unfortunately, there is very little that can be done about the mass creature destruction spells other than to play very carefully by only ever casting one creature at a time and forcing the opponent to cast those spells with minimum effect.

Mono Green – Critter Reset

Green is a pretty self-contained colour. It has no inherent weakness such as being unable to deal with Artifacts, Lands or Enchantments. It also has some of the most efficient and interesting critters in the game which could cause all those Red decks a lot of problems.

Unfortunately, the un-targetable critters that are so excellent against control decks are not as effective without the support of Red's Direct Damage to clear the territory of possible blockers. Without the artillery, the critters need to be strong enough to survive most combat situations and therefore need to have a more balanced Power to Toughness ratio.

The Stampeding Wildebeests' interesting drawback that returns a green creature you control to owner's hand during Upkeep is quite minimal and can be turned to an advantage. It can reset the Cumulative Upkeep on the Yavimaya Ants, it can regenerate the toughness of the Wall of Roots and it can allow the Uktabi Orangutan to be re-cast to target another artifact.

Another advantage of using solid, honest critters is that you can use the awesome Giant Growth. Careful use of the timing of Giant Growth can turn it into a Lightning Bolt and a Healing Salve in one. It can also be used to great effect on the River Boa or the Elvish Archers so that they can take down an opponent's BFC and survive to fight another day.

RED/GREEN/WHITE UNTOUCHABLES

CREATURES
4 Jolrael's Centaur
3 Maro
2 Deadly Insect
3 Wildfire Emissary
3 Ogre Enforcer

SPELLS
2 Pacifism
4 Incinerate
2 Guerrilla Tactics
2 Hammer of Bogarden
3 Creeping Mold
3 Disenchant
3 Armageddon
2 Moss Diamond
2 Fire Diamond

LANDS
3 Undiscovered Paradise
2 Thawing Glaciers
3 Karplusan Forest
4 Plains
4 Forest
6 Mountains

SIDEBOARD
4 Pyroblast
2 CoP Red
2 Whirling Dervish
2 Pyrokenesis
3 City of Solitude
1 Creeping Mold
1 Disenchant

Erhnam Djinn
Summon Djinn
During your upkeep, target non-wall creature an opponent controls gains forestwalk until your next turn. Ignore this effect if there are no legal targets.
4/5

"5th Edition has removed (and didn't really replace) some excellent BFCs, among them the mighty Ernham Djinn."

MY DECK

Paul Barclay

the gaming magazine arcane MAGIC The Gathering ESSENTIAL TIPS!

Hell's Caretakers meet Rukh Eggs meet Doppelgangers in Magic aficionado Paul Barclay's favourite deck. It may not be the most likely combination, but it's certainly fun to play.

PETER T. HOOPER

LAND
4 Badlands
4 City of Brass
1 Forest
4 Island
1 Maze of Ith
2 Strip Mine
2 Swamp
3 Tropical Island
2 Underground Sea
4 Volcanic Island

SPELLS
3 Animate Dead
4 Concordant Crossroads
4 Fireball
4 Rukh Egg
2 Shatterstorm

CREATURES
4 Hell's Caretaker
4 Vesuvan Doppelganger
4 Clone

ARTIFACTS
1 Ivory Tower
2 Nevinyrral's Disk
1 Zuran Orb

KEYCARDS
4 Rukh Egg
4 Hell's Caretaker
4 Vesuvan Doppelganger
4 Clone

When we think of the top UK players, we would be wrong in thinking that they only play super-powered tournament decks that can reduce an opponent to smoking rubble. Paul Barclay is the UK number 7 and his favourite deck is anything but a killer tourney affair.

"A favourite deck is a bit of an odd concept for me, due to my normal method of deck-building. Decks that I build tend to only last a matter of days, because I build them a couple of days before a tournament or a meeting and then retire them afterwards. I suppose my most favourite deck would have to be 'A la Peter T. Hooper'. This deck was a Rukh Egg-Hell's Caretaker engine deck, which could create an infinite number of Rukhs (which are 4/4 Red flying token creatures), due to a complex card combo.

"The aim of the deck was to create lots of Rukhs, and then use them to kill your opponent. It used to work very well in multi-player games. Well, either that or everybody killed it very quickly. Other than that, one person has commented that one of the aims of the deck must have been to die horrendously to White Weenie decks in duels. While I didn't build the deck with that in mind, it has performed admirably in this capacity – White Weenie 7, Peter T. Hooper 0."

Building the deck

"I had a Hell's Caretaker and a Rukh Egg on the table in front of me, when I was trading one day. I asked the guy that I was trading with, 'Have you got any more of these Egg thingies?' He did, and I built the original deck that night. The two cards just seemed made for each other."

Of course any deck needs tweaking before it comes close to working. This is not so much of a problem with friendly decks, although even they require a little fine-tuning.

"The deck really doesn't work that well. If people leave it alone for a bit, or it draws a good hand of cards, it will work. It is too vulnerable to too many decks to work outside a multi-player environment. Anybody who knows how it works can cripple it by killing the key cards (the Hell's Caretakers). Because it is a fun deck, I haven't made any effort to keep up with new expansions, although there are a few cards that I'd like to add to it now, such as Necromancy from *Visions*.

"The key cards are the Hell's Caretakers. Without these, there is simply no way that the deck could function. Keeping them alive is a huge problem, but adding Animate Dead to the deck helped tremendously, because it allowed me to re-use the Caretakers. The Clones, Vesuvan Doppelgangers and Concordant Crossroads are there for the infinite omelette combo, and this is really fun when it works properly. However, it doesn't work all that often."

Playing 'Peter T. Hooper'

When you build a deck it is vital that you understand how it works and what its shortcomings are. Without this insight a deck is doomed to failure, and this applies to fun decks as much as tournament ones.

"Against a fast deck, this deck will usually just lose, because it cannot possibly keep up. In multi-player games, the best tactic is to not look too dangerous, but not to look completely undefended, for as long as possible.

"If your opponent doesn't know what you are playing, don't cast the Rukh Eggs until you need to – these are the cards that are most likely to give the purpose of the deck away."

Because 'Peter T. Hooper' is a fun deck it has had some moments of glory, when everything falls into place and the deck worked to absolute perfection.

"Killing someone with 250,000 Rukhs was quite fun. We were in the dying minutes of a big multi-player, and nobody that I was playing with had seen the combo in play before then. Dealing one million damage exactly is quite a rewarding thing to do.

"I once copied a Battering Ram with a Vesuvan Doppelganger. While this may seem silly at first, my opponent was playing with Terror. If I had Doppelgangered my Hell's Caretaker, he could have Terrored the Doppelganger (because it would have been Blue, not Black). The Battering Ram was an Artifact creature so it was unaffected by Terror. Sadly, the Doppelganger and the Caretaker were both Fireballed on her very next turn. Serves me right for trying to be clever, I suppose."

This deck is so heavily combo-orientated, the actual mechanics of the deck need some explanation. So, over to Paul.

"Well, here's how the 'infinite omelette combo' works... You need a Rukh Egg, a Concordant Crossroads and two Vesuvan Doppelgangers in play and either another Doppelganger or a Clone in the graveyard. One of the Doppelgangers in play should be copying a Hell's Caretaker, the other should be copying a Rukh Egg.

"During your Upkeep, tap the Doppelganger-Caretaker and sacrifice the Doppelganger-Rukh Egg to bring back the Clone. When the Clone comes into play, let it copy the Doppelganger-Caretaker. Then, switch the Doppelganger-Caretaker to copy the Rukh Egg. You're now back to where you started, so you can continue indefinitely, creating as many Rukhs as you want at the end of the turn."

So look out for Paul in a multi-player near you, and if you see a Rukh or a Caretaker get rid of it fast. After all, you wouldn't want to end up with egg on your face.

Fireball
X
Sorcery
Fireball deals X damage divided evenly, round down, among any number of target creatures and/or players. Pay an additional 1 for each target beyond the first.
Illus. Mark Tedin
Swamp
Add to your mana pool.
Illus. © Dan Frazier

WHO IS PAUL BARCLAY?

Currently ranked number 7 in the UK and 156 in the world, Paul Barclay started playing in 1994 at the tail end of the Dark, and quickly succumbed to *Magic's* strange addition. In 1995 he got a job in America, purchasing many of the old power cards while he was there. Returning to England he started to play more seriously and he is now more involved in the rules and judging side of the game.

"Use the joypad Luke."

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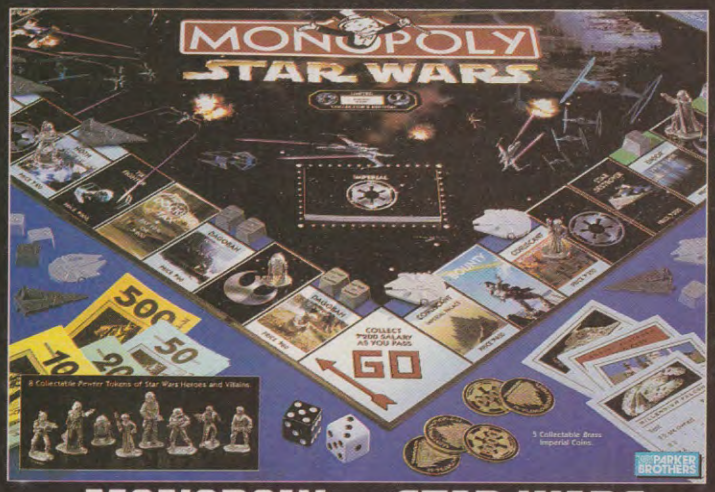

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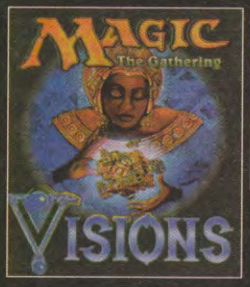

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The Icons

Each review in arcane is identified with a rather nifty icon showing what kind of game it is. Here's what they mean:

Books and Supplements

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Roleplaying Systems

Board Games, Miniature Systems

The Scores

Everything reviewed in arcane gets a mark out of 10. Here's a guide to what the individual marks represent...

10/10
Perfect.
There's simply nothing better.

9/10
Excellent, a classic.
Highly recommended.

8/10
Very good, with few problems.
Recommended.

7/10
Good, but not exceptional.

6/10
Above average, but not without problems.

5/10
Average, or a mixture of good and bad.

4/10
Below average, but not without merit.

3/10
Poor, crucially flawed in some way.

2/10
Very poor, should be avoided.

1/10
Appallingly bad, no redeeming features at all.

the gaming magazine arcane reviews THIS MONTH

Champions: New Millennium

on page 56 The classic superhero RPG gets Fuzion power.

Magic: The Gathering 5th Edition

on page 60

WotC continue to weed out the cards that break games – but have they diluted Magic?

Magic CD-Rom on page 64

Card games on a computer? This one's a lot better than patience or blackjack. Trust us.

Star Wars

on page 62

An *even easier* version of West End's film-based RPG.

arcane SEAL OF APPROVAL

Despite some eagerly-awaited releases in this month's reviews section, we didn't feel that any of the products deserved the coveted **arcane** Seal of Approval.

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Champions: T New Millenni

It's back — bigger, faster and stronger than ever before! something like that, anyway.

The Big Name in superhero RPGs is back, with a new publisher, a new universe, state-of-the-art graphics, and a *Fuzion*-powered rules update. But surely no-one takes cloaks, tights and improperly displayed underpants seriously these days?

Before getting into that, though, let's look at what *Champions: The New Millennium* is. A new game? Well, not exactly. A major new edition of an old game? Almost, but not quite. A new worldbook for an old game? Sort of...

After Hero Games, creators of the long-established *Champions,* split with Iron Crown Enterprises (see 'A History of Heroes'), they talked about remaining entirely independent, and even published a couple of supplements on computer diskette. But then they found themselves a new publishing partner in R Talsorian Games.

The two companies even decided to merge their main rule-sets, and named the result *Fuzion.* A version of the new system was first seen, a few months ago, in Talsorian's *Bubblegum Crisis* RPG, and more are promised, including some from other companies. Now, though, it's *Champions'* turn. But this isn't just the superhero implementation of *Fuzion* – it's also a new gameworld.

"Yes, Champions has now gained random character background determination!"

Oddly enough, Hero have always had an ambiguous attitude to this idea. On the one hand, the *Hero System* was intended to enable gamers to build everything from scratch, including the setting – it was a tool-kit, not a campaign. On the other hand, though, gamers do want ready-to-use material, as even the most imaginative of us sometimes run short of time, and Hero wanted to sell supplements. The writers set out to oblige.

The result was often a bland mish-mash of clichés and blatant Marvel/DC rip-offs, with some islands of originality and even brilliance. Power levels were a particular problem – every author designed for the sort of playing group they were accustomed to, which depended a lot on starting points levels and experience awards. In many recent supplements, faceless agents seemed to have grown tougher than many players' superhero PCs, while others had the world threatened by master villains who could barely worry a local police department.

This book represents a fresh start, casting aside all the old material and its inconsistencies. A few character and group names are preserved from the old universe, but generally, it's just the names – origins and relationships are completely changed. Some of these changes are small enough to seem futile (Quantum is now an ex-agent rather than a doctor), while others are so large as to make the use of the name more confusing than anything else (Crusader, previously a night-prowling martial artist, is now a time-travelling medieval knight).

The game is set early in the next century, after a battle with a vastly powerful villain has wiped out many of the world's heroes, leaving a dangerous gap to be filled by the PCs. In other words, this is slightly more than the 'revitalisation' of the original ideas that the introduction talks about...

But let's start with the book itself.

The presentation of *The New Millennium* is about what you'd expect from a superhero game published by R Talsorian in 1997. In other words, it's striking, melodramatic, and a little sloppy round the edges. There're even a couple of blocks of full-colour comic strip, one of them complete with side-notes explaining events in game-mechanical terms. The illustrations are very much in the manner of current superhero comics – meaning grotesque anatomy stuffed inside implausible costumes (especially on the melon-chested women), and everyone looking as though they are shouting at each other all the time. If this style appeals, you'll like the art.

Unfortunately, the text is a mish-mash of different styles, and suffers from some being better than others – "Too much the Personification of the Key Energy though, The Destroyer could not be fully slain. But he could be bound,

A History of Heroes

***Champions* is one of the most significant games in the short history of RPGs, so it's worth looking back over its past.**

When it first appeared, in 1981, it wasn't the first superhero RPG, but many people decided it was the best. Likewise, the authors didn't exactly invent points-based character creation, or character disadvantages, but they made them work smoothly; most modern games owe them something, and often a vast debt. And the game took a thoughtful look at its subject.

What the authors saw was that there were too many super-powers in the comic books, with too many variations, to make a complete list. So they let players build their own. There was no "Ice Missile" or "Lightning Bolt" defined in *Champions;* there was "Energy Blast," which could be Armour Piercing, or Autofire, or Area Effect, or whatever. The result was an enormously flexible game, but one that needed some effort to get right.

***Champions* went through three editions that mostly tidied up the layout and clarified a few things, and then a fourth that attempted to combine the best ideas from previous versions and supplements, while correcting a few small problems and integrating rules for other genres that had previously been covered by separate games (such as *Fantasy Hero* and *Danger International*). This produced the generic *Hero System.* (Some people thought that the changes didn't go far enough, but it was certainly the best version of the rules so far.)**

By now, though, Hero Games had decided that they weren't cut out to be full-time games publishers and struck a publishing deal with Iron Crown Enterprises. And *Champions,* which had seen off several strong competitors, had built up a dedicated following. But the world was changing. Comics were becoming more complicated, and the most significant comic characters were no longer necessarily cloak-wearing pacifist vigilantes with soap-opera private lives. Meanwhile, RPG rules were becoming simpler, as attention shifted to backgrounds – the *Hero System,* with its long list of characteristics and number-crunching system, became a bit of a joke in some circles. New gamers who wanted to play powerful beings in the modern world were more likely to plump for angst-ridden vampires or eco-warrior werewolves.

Then, last year, came Hero's split with Iron Crown. For a while, it looked as though *Champions* might become a minor product, with supplements solely published on computer diskette. But then came the R Talsorian deal, and *Fuzion*...

The Fuzion Rulebook

HOW GLORIOUS THIS NEW AGE IS!
TRULY, THERE ARE NONE WHO CAN STAND AGAINST ME!!
PLANS OF LASTING CONQUEST MUST BE DEVELOPED OVER TIME...NURTURED AND PRODDED ALONG.
AND THIS MOMENT HAS BEEN DESTINED FOR SO LONG...
LONG BEFORE THESE CHILDREN WERE EVEN BORN!
LOOKS LIKE I ARRIVED JUST IN TIME FOR THE PARTY!
FOR NOW, AT LAST MY OLD FRIEND, YOU ARE MINE!
NEXT: THE CATACLYSMIC CONCLUSION!!
CHAMPIONS: THE ADVENTURE
CHAPTER SEVEN: GAMEMASTERING
COMBAT
THE SETUP
THE LAB BUILDING
AFTERWARD
031 3504

aye, and deeply, within the bowels of the Earth." Or, just for us UK gamers, "Jonathon is of the British nobility and has such airs and pretensions as are appropriate…") Of course, this could be a problem of taste, but what *is* poor is the book's organisation. It has a short contents list at the front, and no index. The *Fuzion* rules section then has its own contents guide. (An index does take some work, but modern computerised publishing helps a lot, and they are far too useful for publishers to get away with missing them out.) The traditional "What is role-playing?" paragraph appears in chapter two, and points the new gamer straight to the detailed rules-mechanics deeper in the book (which have their own short "What is role-playing?" section).

The first half of the book consists of information about the world, partly as told to a new would-be superhero. Fair enough, but it's arranged so that data on some organisations is in one place, the section on global affairs, while others – some just as large and world-spanning – are detailed later, in the section on the suggested campaign city.

Character sheets with game stats are pushed to the back of the book, which is fine – it stops them breaking up the flow of the text, but not every character mentioned is detailed, and there are no game details for the various agencies (apart from a few of their vehicles), although their politics are discussed quite interestingly and at some length (and well-conceived agents can play an interesting role in a good superhero campaign). I sense supplements coming…

Oh, and those character sheets include some dubiously-calculated secondary characteristics. This did little for my confidence in the designers. The game-world itself is one in which superheroes have been around since the 1930s (as usual), but magic has existed throughout human history, and seems to have become fairly widely accepted since the beginning of the 20th Century, at least by those 'in the know'.

Science and technology are not far beyond the facts of real-world 1997, and a very few people know about the small number of alien races who've visited Earth. (Yes, one lot crashed at Roswell in '47.)

Innate powers seem to be much more often the result of 'mutant' birth than 'lab accidents'. All of this adds up to a slightly more plausible world than in most superhero games or comics, but at the cost of losing some of the exuberance that can make superhero stories so much fun. The designers seem to favour 'ancient mystic secrets' as an explanation for weird stuff, over super-science or alien races; even mutant genes seem to be a side-effect of an old mystical war. This would make more sense if there was less of a clear distinction between magical powers and the quasi-'scientific' special effects associated with mutations. That said, there are also a few rampaging robots and blaster-wielding agents.

IT'S A FUNNY OLD WORLD
One of the hallmarks of Hero Games has always been the wit and humour of its rules. *Champions: TNM* is a little dry, but there still a few good gags for comic fans...

Other parts of the setting are pretty good generic superhero stuff – if a little unimaginative. For example, there are fictional exotic places called Marakat and Samarkan – not to be confused with the real-world cities of Marakesh and Samarkand. Some of these details are only mentioned in the rules-mechanic section in its discussion of character backgrounds.

"A very few people know about the small number of alien races who've visited Earth."

The book then details Bay City as a suggested campaign centre. This is actually San Francisco, refurbished and renamed after a big 'quake in 1995. It's a nice enough location, although the book doesn't make enough of the place's more interesting aspects for outsiders – the hills, the fogs, the gold rush, and the largely liberal, laid-back culture are all unfortunately ignored.

TEAMING UP
Hero Games and R Talsorian are already planning a range of supplements for *Champions*. The first, *Champions: Alliances*, will feature new powers, skills, and organisations.

Fuzion power? A hundred pages into the book, we get the *Fuzion* rules. These are intended to combine the *Hero System* with Talsorian's *Interlock*, albeit partly by offering lots of options and plug-ins. They use one task-resolution mechanism – stat plus skill plus a dice roll must equal or beat a difficulty number, which in combat can be the target's stat plus skill plus a dice roll (if you're

trying to emulate *Interlock*) or plus ten (if you're trying to emulate *Hero*). As that last should suggest, all these options include a lot of references back to the older games. So, despite the fact that *Fuzion* is simpler than the *Hero System* overall, it could be rather confusing for a beginner who's never heard of *Hero* or *Interlock*. The simplicity partly comes from using bigger units than *Hero* when converting *Hero* characters to *Fuzion*. DEX, for example, is calculated by dividing *Hero* DEX by three, while STR is converted by dividing by three or five, depending how high it was before... (Yes, there's a bit of fudging required. See 'From Fourth Edition to *Fuzion*' for more on converting.)

These larger units do eliminate some of the old problem with maths-crazed minimaxers, who sometimes put far too much effort into getting *Hero* characters just right for their points, but at the cost of losing some of the detail and precision of the *Hero* stats. All primary characteristics are now supposed to be as useful as each other, and so cost the same (I'd want to play the game for a few months before I'd say whether this was working right), while secondary characteristics are less easy to adjust. But before you get into the details of the rules, there're character origins to go through. This means rolling up (or choosing) a 'Lifepath', as in Talsorian's *Cyberpunk*. Yes, *Champions* has now gained random character background determination! As an optional system it's not bad, but I certainly wouldn't impose it on players – although it allows for all sorts of soap-opera events in your character's past, it still creates basically ordinary people.

"In the worst tradition of superhero games, the only scenario in the book is a two-page fight scene."

Even in the rather prosaic *New Millennium* world, some superheroes really should have weird upbringings...

And there's also the separate 'Origins Path' table, which involves random dice roles (for power origins, mostly, not power type). Of course, there's nothing to stop you creating your own character concept, using your imagination rather than dice, but some people may appreciate the help in finding a background for their character. The whole section should have been clearly marked 'optional'.

MORE *FUZION* ON THE WAY

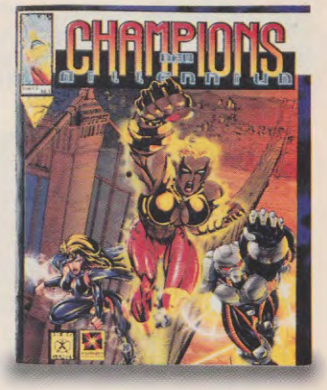
The Fuzion system will also appear in several other games this year, including the *Sengoku* and *Usagi Yojimbo* RPGs from Gold Rush Games, and R Talsorian's long-awaited *Cyberpunk 3rd Edition* (see news this issue).

Anyway, once you've got your history, you can build your character, using points, as ever. Characteristics, powers, and skills and stuff each come from separate pools of points. Although you can move points between these pools with the referee's permission, they do serve to help in creating generally rounded characters with a good selection of both skills and powers – something that previous editions of CHampions could have problems with.

Disadvantages have now been re-named 'Complications', and characters generally seem to have only a few of these each. This is an improvement on later-edition *Champions*, where starting heroes always seemed to be laden down with enemies and major psychological hang-ups. (Of course, some players will decide to grab every point they can get.) But much of this has to come from

LOOK BEFORE YOU BUY

The Fuzion rules have been made available on the Internet for free downloads. Point your browsers at: http://www.sabram.com/rtalsoriangames/site/fuzion/index.html



various 'Plug-Ins', which cover Superpowers, Psionics, and Martial Arts. The giant robot design Plug-In (a cut-down version of RTG's *Mekton* rules) isn't generally relevant for superhero play, although it is used to define a few vehicles elsewhere in the book.

Unfortunately, the Plug-Ins are where the *Fuzion* system breaks down a little. The system design looks rushed, with too many inconsistencies and implausibilities – 'Streetfighting', the most basic 'Martial Art', for example, permits an exotic ranged 'Ki Blast.' It seems silly to try to fit whole systems onto a couple of pages, when *Champions* took much of its rulebook to explain them in clear detail with lots of examples. Old *Champions* players will hit a lot of problems, actually – not only have some powers been dropped, but Elemental Controls and Power Pools have disappeared too, and Multipowers are heavily simplified.

'Advantages' and 'Limitations' have been dropped or incorporated into powers, sometimes strangely. As the text itself says in one place, Explosive Blasts should logically cost three (*Fuzion*) points for two dice, but instead they cost one point per dice, then subtract two dice from the final total. You can always use the original powers rules and convert in *Fuzion*, as long as you don't mind carrying both books around, but it's a shame that things do look so rushed and cramped, because at heart, this is a neat generic rules system, simpler than the *Hero* System, and with a couple of improvements – for example, Killing Attacks no longer cause wildly variable stun effects, but resemble normal attacks more. It just needs a careful re-write and a bit of editing.

The last part of the book – aside from the sample characters – is a chapter of advice on refereeing. This includes the only 'scenario' in the book; in the worst tradition of superhero games, this is a two-page fight scene.

Superhero campaigns should consist of much more than just super-battles, but colourful, high-power, low-lethality combat does sometimes tend to take over. To be fair, the general advice is actually pretty good, though, if not especially original – some of it is new, while most of it reads like a re-phrasing of the rather looser notes in the back of *Fourth Edition Champions*. And that's all-too typical of this book.

So far, then, *The New Millennium* offers very little that the last edition of *Champions* didn't provide. The new setting is routine, and *Fuzion* is less flexible than the old rules, and although it's faster and simpler, you need the old rules to design some powers.

Meanwhile, Gold Rush Games, and many shops, have stocks of the old edition, with plenty of supplements, and Gold Rush are even promising a range of new *Fourth Edition* material. So a lot of people won't convert over, and I'm not convinced that many should.

Despite some flaws, *Fourth Edition* read like a mature, well-developed game. *The New Millennium* seems rushed, with quite a few too many rough edges for a professional production. That's not exactly to say that it's bad. It's a very nice idea to make much of the output of the very talented designers at Hero and Talsorian (and, in future, other companies) compatible.

By making *Fuzion* widely available, 'The Fuzion Group' are giving gamers the hope of a wide range of roleplaying games, all using the same flexible, dramatic system – and presenting a serious alternative to the more thoughtful, realistic *GURPS*. But in itself, this isn't the revitalisation of *Champions* that we'd been promised – it's more like a sideline.

From Fourth Edition to Fuzion

Current *Champions* players will want to know how easy it is to convert between the old system and *Fuzion*. The answer is supposed to be that it's simple – *Fuzion* was intended as an expansion for the *Hero System*, not a replacement. Unfortunately, it hasn't quite worked. The book does include guidelines for converting characters to *Fuzion*. First, you take the old characteristics, and do some arithmetic to produce the new versions. Simple? Yes, but also debatable. *Fuzion* CON, for example, which serves many of the same functions as *Champions* CON, is calculated off PD and ED, while *Fuzion* SPD – which plays exactly the same role as in *Champions* – is defined as half REF, which in turn is equal to *Champions* OCV. So only the most dextrous of martial artists are likely to retain the SPD 6 which is their *Hero* trademark – unless you factor skill levels into the OCV, in which case some lumbering bricks with a bit of boxing training are going to turn into speedsters...

Powers present a different problem. You could just divide all costs by five and convert them straight over, as the notes imply – but with Elemental Controls, Power Pools, and several powers and modifiers missing, that's going to produce a lot of characters with stuff that doesn't appear in the *Fuzion* rules. Still, it'd be less annoying than trying to convert a moderately detailed *Champions* hero to 'proper' *Fuzion*. Skills, Perks, and Talents look less painful, as the old and new lists have a lot in common – but there are a few details to cause screeching of brakes, particularly the loss of the old *Champions* 'Skill Levels' concept. And Disadvantages (and, theoretically, some Power Limitations) convert to Complications, which are much more 'generalised' and differently structured – I'd just convert these as felt right. I certainly wouldn't bother checking that the character was balanced on points in the new version. This is a lot of fiddling to produce a new version of an old character who'll play more-or-less the same. The rules are not sufficient incentive for contented *Champions* players to switch to *Fuzion*. Unfortunately, there're few notes on converting *Fuzion* characters to *Hero*, although it'd be easy enough to reverse the process given – so bringing *Bubblegum Crisis* characters into *Champions* would take some work, but not too much.

VITAL INFO

title: *Champions: The New Millennium*

system: An RPG/worldbook

price: £14.95

publisher: Hero/R Talsorian Games

001 510 549 1373

released: Out now

e-mail: bruce@herogames.com

web site: http://www.herogames.com

And the players said...

Andy: "Not without its problems, but a sturdy base to build from nonetheless."

Steve: "It's great. Pass me my cape."

Dan: "I prefer *Golden Heroes*."

Looking elsewhere...

There's *Superhero: 2044*, *Golden Heroes* and *Underground*, but *Champions* is the great survivor. Indeed, the biggest competitor for *The New Millennium* may be the previous edition. *GURPS Supers* is still around and 'weird/supernatural' games such as White Wolf's *Vampire* or SJG's *In Nomine* are also about playing powerful beings in a present-day world. And if you like *Fuzion* but want a different background, there's always RTG's *Bubblegum Crisis*.

The Final Verdict

"*Champions: The New Millennium* offers colourful superhero gaming.that lets you mix in stuff from old *Champions* books, *Bubblegum Crisis*, *Cyberpunk*, and *Mekton Zeta*. On the down-side, though, the writing is not always the best, there's no index, the rules seem rushed, and the whole book suffers from confused design. The new gameworld is internally consistent, but nothing too special. Existing players used to the detail of old-style *Champions* probably won't convert, while new players may get confused by all the optional stuff. But *Champions* is back. Some good support material could make it a winner yet."

Phil Masters

Score 6/10

Magic: The Gathering 5th Edition

fifth edition, eh? Does this mean that Wizards of The Coast has screwed it up on the previous four occasions? Let's see...

How on Earth do you go about reviewing *Magic: The Gathering?* This is the game that stands above the rest in terms of popularity, with god only knows how many millions of people now ardently playing the thing across the globe. This is the game that kicked off the whole collectable card game phenomena, and, some could argue, breathed new life into other areas of the hobby gaming market. This is the game which you either love or hate, which you either hold up as a paragon of gaming craftsmanship or chastise as being a money-making spin-off from proper gaming exercised solely for profit by Wizards of the Coast. Not an easy thing to review, then.

IT'S TOO HARD!

Magic, it has to be said, isn't the easiest of games to get to grips with. Which is why, possibly, Wizards is launching a cut-down, rules-lite version called *Portal*. Expect to see it by the end of the summer.

Which is why I've split this review into two. For those of you who are familiar with *Magic,* the majority of my review looks at the differences between this, the *5th Edition,* and the previous *4th Edition* with which you will have played. And for those of you who aren't, I've boxed-out some details on *Magic* as a game in its own right, with a brief explanation of its strengths and weaknesses, together with an overview of the rules.

But it is the differences between the 5th and the earlier editions that will interest the majority of you, so let's first take a look at these. First off, there's a very obvious difference in the mix of cards in *5th Edition.* Scanning though your first few starter and booster packs you can't help but notice that many of the old *4th Edition* favourites are gone, and that in their place are numerous additions from those expansion sets which have appeared over the past couple of years since *4th Edition* was released. Notably, there are a great many cards from the now deceased *Ice Age* set, and it's good to see many of them back. There are also cards from *Homelands* and *Alliances,* though these are less frequent and not so easy to spot because they are typically the more generic cards to appear in those sets, rather than those which gave those expansions their distinctive flavour.

get your head out of that sand!

Yes, it's hard to believe, but there's still a sizeable number of gamers out there who have never played *Magic: The Gathering.* There are even some who don't know what it's all about. Strange, yes, but true. So you guys, this bit is for you; a brief description of *Magic* and an attempt to tell you why it's considered to be so good.

***Magic* is played, almost invariably, by two people. Each has a deck of around 60 cards constructed from a pool of several thousand available cards. The cards represent either spells which can be cast, or land; the source of power which must be temporarily drained in order to cast a spell. There are five types of land, each one represented by a colour, and five core colours of spell which correspond to those types of land. To cast a red spell, therefore, you must drain the power from (or 'tap') a red piece of land (a mountain).**

Each player has a starting life pool of 20 points and the aim of the game is to reduce your opponent's life pool to zero. You do this by casting spells which either directly attack him, or by casting spells which summon creatures which can attack him. Creatures can also defend you, so in order to do damage to an opponent with creatures, you must overcome his own creatures and win through his defences.

The game is played in turns, the sequence of which is as follows: untap tapped creatures, lands and other cards; work out upkeep costs (some cards must be paid for in land to keep them in play); pick up a card from your deck and place it in your hand; play land if you have any in your hand; cast spells using the land on the table before you; attack with your creatures if you so wish; cast other spells if you've still got any spare, untapped land; and discard cards from your hand if you've got more than seven.

Well, that's it more or less, although, there are thousands of other rules, as defined on the cards, which can affect this sequence.

***Magic* is a pretty complicated game, mainly because the timing of spells makes everything pretty hard to keep track of; some spells are faster to cast than others and can interrupt the casting of others, so whenever a series of spells is cast, you must work out in which order they take effect. There are also dozens of other core rules which must be learned and which, for the most part, pertain to creature combat. This is a section of the game which can again become pretty complicated.**

However, *Magic* is so popular because it's so incredibly diverse; the thousands of cards available make deck building great fun and there are a near infinite number of different decks which can be created. It's also so popular because it was the very first collectable card game and has an entrenched following. *Magic* is a superb game, but it's one that can also end up costing you a lot of money if you get seriously into it; ask any player at tournament level. If they've bought less than £200 worth of *Magic* cards I'd be extremely surprised.

"This is the game which you either love or hate, which you either hold up as a paragon of gaming craftsmanship or chastise as being a money-making spin-off from proper gaming."

And this, it has to be said, seems to have watered down *Magic* somewhat. *4th Edition* had a very definite flavour of its own, albeit a fairly difficult one to place, whereas *5th Edition* is rather bland in comparison. No doubt this is yet another move on the behalf of Wizards to level the playing field by taking out some of the more powerful (and in many instances interesting) cards, around which so many classic combos and decks have been created. For example, one of my personal favourites, the Royal Assassin, has been discarded, and so the classic Royal Assassin/Kismet creature-killer will now be illegal in Type II tournament play. Shame.

There are some new cards – which is refreshing to see – though most of them are variations of cards which already exist. There are, for instance, 'super' circles of protection which protect against more than one colour, though the activation cost is appropriately higher. The introduction of new cards to the game shouldn't really be done, I feel, through new versions of the core rules and card set – that's what expansion sets are for, after all. However, with the new cards in *5th Edition* I can see why they were added – they are the fairly bland, flavourless cards which perhaps wouldn't have fitted into an expansion set.

This new edition of *Magic* is, because of the card mix, less fun to play on its own than *4th Edition*. *Magic* is now only really good fun when decks are constructed mainly from expansion set cards, with some core cards from the *5th Edition* added to balance a deck and to fill in the gaps. Perhaps this is deliberate – it gets you to buy more cards from the other expansions – but I can only feel that it's to the detriment of the game for those people who only want to buy a few cards, perhaps a couple of starters each, and play to have some fun. If that's what you're after, then there are now some far better collectable card games to chose from.

VITAL INFO

title	*Magic: The Gathering 5th Edition*
system:	a collectable card game
price:	starter pack £6.95, booster £2.25
publisher:	Wizards of the Coast
	0345 125599
released:	Out now
web site:	http://wotc.ukonline.co.uk

Also available...

There are now dozens of collectable card games on the market, though *Magic* remains the most popular. Favourites here in the office include *Netrunner*, which is also designed by *Magic's* creator, Richard Garfield; *Mythos*, which is based on the *Call of Cthulhu* RPG and the works of HP Lovecraft; and *Legends of the Five Rings*, which is even more complicated than *Magic*, but which has an excellent Feudal Japanese flavour.

The Final Verdict

"*Magic: The Gathering* is an excellent and absorbing game, which has a huge following (you're never going to be short of people to play with). However, some of the rules structures are clumsy and make it overly complicated. The *5th Edition* is not as much fun to play as earlier core sets, though most people will be creating decks with cards from other expansions too, which makes it more exciting. *Magic* is still one of the very best CCGs, but *5th Edition* adds little to it, and takes too much away."

Paul Pettengale

Score 8/10

Star Wars

Introductory Adventure Game

> I sense a great disturbance in the Force... as if thousands of newcomers all started roleplaying together, and were suddenly hooked.

NITPICKER'S GUIDE TO *STAR WARS* #1

In the opening scene, C-3P0 refers to Leia by name: 'There'll be no escape for the Princess this time'. But by the time he gets to Luke's garage, he's forgotten who she is: 'I believe she was a passenger... a person of some importance'.

An entry level RPG; one that a complete newcomer to the hobby could pick up, read, understand and play straight out of the box, has long been a Holy Grail for games designers. It's often said that RPG rules are too complicated for the novice, but I think this is a fallacy. Anyone who can master the labyrinthine complexities of the average CCG ought to have no problem with most roleplaying rules. The real problem is that roleplaying is such a basically weird pastime, that it's hard for the beginner to know what s/he is supposed to be doing. Worse, a good RPG requires a good referee, and refereeing is a pretty arcane skill to expect a neophyte to pick up within ten minutes of getting his new toy out of the wrapper. Hence, people wanting to get into RPGs are more often directed to the club than the game shop.

So, will the *Star Wars Introductory Adventure Game* – a snazzily produced boxed set containing three small, colourful, non-intimidating booklets, a lot of pretty cards, stand-up playing pieces and some actually rather disappointing grey floorplans and maps – finally succeed in explaining RPGs to Joe Novice?

The first thing to be said is that this isn't a simplification of the *Star Wars* rules, which are, after all, pretty simple to begin with. Most of the familiar mechanics are here and someone who had learned the rules only from this introductory set could join in a group playing standard *Second Edition*, with very little culture shock.

However, the foliage of the system has been ruthlessly pruned. There are only half a dozen character templates to chose from and only the briefest summaries of the most common starships, weapons and aliens. This is sensible; Joe Novice certainly doesn't want to be hit with an information overload before he's even started. Having said that, the game covers most of the familiar hardware from the films. It gives you stats for an Imperial Walker, which is more than the first edition of the RPG did.

So, what is 'introductory' about this game? Simply put, it is about as clearly explained an introduction to roleplaying as you could imagine; everything is approached clearly and methodically and, a lot of the time, entertainingly. In fact it's all been done so well that I wonder whether the author is in fact a professional teacher or perhaps an author of text books.

NITPICKER'S GUIDE TO *STAR WARS* #2

Darth Vader says the attack on Yavin IV occurs on the same day as his fight with Ben Kenobi: 'This will be a day long remembered... 'So why does Luke say to Biggs: "I've got lots of stories to tell you", rather than: "You won't believe the kind of afternoon I've had."

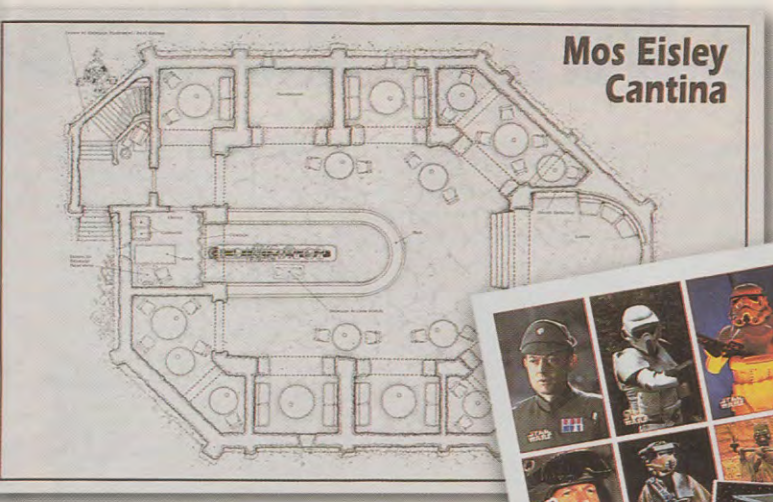
NITPICKER'S GUIDE TO *STAR WARS* #3

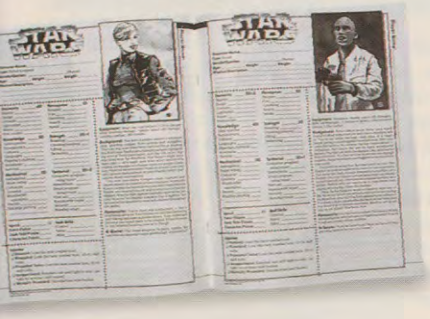
How does Darth Vader get to Cloud City before Han and Leia when he doesn't know that that's where they're headed?

education policy

Previous attempts at entry level RPGs have tended to adopt two types of approaches: some try to short-circuit the problem of explaining what refereeing and roleplaying are by trying to encode them in the game system itself. This tends to produce something which is more like a conventional boardgame. *Warhammer Quest, Talisman* and, arguably, *Magic* are the products of this approach. They are good games but, on most people's definitions, not roleplaying games but rather a case of throwing out the baby with the bath water. At the other extreme, games like *Prince Valiant* chuck out virtually all the rules and rely on the players innate storytelling and acting ability to carry the day.

***Star Wars'* approach is to teach the rules first and then gradually wean the players on to the idea of roleplaying. So, first, the novice has to grasp the basic ideas of skill rolls and character sheets, and only then does he get to play out a simple battle that is not much different from a skirmish board wargame. Once he's used to that, we suggest to him that he might talk in character during the fight, and only then do we present him with an encounter that he has to talk his way out of, rather than fight. This is almost the precise opposite of *Everway*, where you have to think of a character, talk about him and roleplay him for a few minutes, before considering fleshing him out with numbers and skills. As a believer in RPGs-as-art, I think I prefer *Everway's* approach, but *Star Wars* is much less likely to scare off the nervous beginner.**





VITAL INFO

title	Star Wars Introductory Adventure Game
system:	a roleplaying game
price:	£15.99
publisher:	West End Games
	001 717 253 6990
released:	out now

And the players said...

TOM: "This game eases you gently into roleplaying."

STEVE: "Definitely going in my little brother's stocking."

IAN: "If roleplaying games were easier to understand to start with, things like this wouldn't be needed!"

Also available...

There are many introductory RPGs out there. The first edition of *Marvel Superheroes* is another good one. Here, the very simple rules were explained by your favourite Marvel character. The original *Ghostbusters*, a sort of cousin for *Star Wars*, set new standards for simplicity. It was said that you could design a character in three minutes, two of which were spent thinking up a silly name for it. White Wolf's *Streetfighter* RPG appeals to some. And if things get desperate, there's always *Basic D&D*.

The Final Verdict

"This is one of the best intros to RPGs I've ever seen. If you have a non-roleplaying friend or a younger brother or sister who you want to corrupt, your best bet is still to take them along to the club or run a scenario for them yourself. But if that isn't possible, then this would make a great birthday present. And you can always nick the maps and cards for your own game..."

Andrew Rilstone

Score 9/10

Joe Novice's first encounter with RPGs comes in a small 'Player's Book'. He's given a fully filled-out character sheet and a mega-simple programmed solo scenario running to only about 12 paragraphs, which explains the basic game concepts as it goes along. This is, of course, how any referee worth his salt explains RPGs to a new players; he chucks them into an exciting situation, asks them what they want to do, and only explains what a 6D blaster attack is when they start using their blaster. The rest of the book is spent introducing the concept of character generation and skill roles in slightly more detail. Within about 20 minutes, Joe has a pretty good idea of what roleplaying is about. The psychological advantage of giving a brand new player a 20-page book and saying, 'This tells you everything you need to know' is enormous.

The referee's book adopts a similar approach. It begins with another pre-programmed adventure – little more than a simple combat between rebels and stormtroopers which Joe is expected to lead his players through. This is followed by a concise explanation of the rules proper. This is the one point where Joe starts to panic; even 20 pages of rules is a lot if you have spent your life playing *Cluedo*. It is the point at which he is asked to distinguish between opposed roles and difficulty roles where Joe starts to freak.

However, this is more than made up for by the adventure book; a full-sized supplement shaped thing which is quite superb. In fact, Joe Novice would be better off reading this first and using the referee's book as a reference tool when he needs something clarified. It contains six scenarios making up a campaign. And, as scenarios in their own right, they are pretty good; featuring a group of rebels who survive an Imperial assault on their base on a conquered planet trying to get to the main rebel HQ. There is a very nice sense of escalation in the adventure with the PCs acquiring more and better equipment as the story progresses. A single land speeder is a valuable prize in the first scenario, and the players spend the first few adventures with a single Y-Wing and no means of replacing its photon torpedoes. By the end of the game, they've linked up with the rebels and are able to launch an assault on a Star Destroyer. This is good plotting in any game, and particularly appropriate for beginning players, because it introduces them to game concepts one at a time. They don't have to understand vehicle combat in the first scenario, because they haven't got any vehicles.

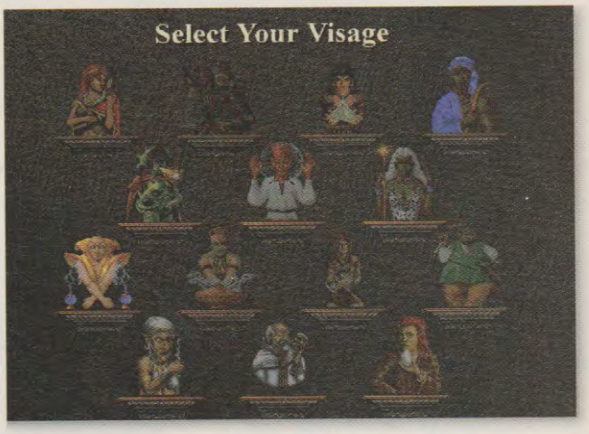
A lot of the actual scenes are very well conceived as well, promoting the *Star Wars* mind-set of melodrama and OTT action; one scenario involves salvaging equipment from a rebel capital ship which has crashed on the planet and is currently dangling over the edge of a cliff.

But the best thing about the book is the clarity of its explanations. Joe didn't feel that he was struggling through a reference book, or even reading a story; he felt that an experienced referee was chatting to him, giving clear, sensible advice about how to run the game and give the players a good time. Each time a new game concept appears, the basic rules for it are clearly reiterated. Sidebars draw Joe's attention to some of the tricks of the trade which the scenario writers use. Boxouts contain good advice about sound effects, the use of music, ways of punishing your PCs without killing them, and so on. Even the artwork is good, which is something of a first for a *Star Wars* supplement.

"A lot of the scenes are very well conceived, promoting the *Star Wars* mind-set of melodrama and OTT action."

Magic: The Gath

It's taken more than two years to arrive, but is *Magic* on the PC as good as the game on which it's based?



MORE TO COME
arcane has learnt that MicroProse will be launching expansion CD-ROMs which will contain the cards from more recent expansion sets. Quite when they'll be with us, however, we really don't know.

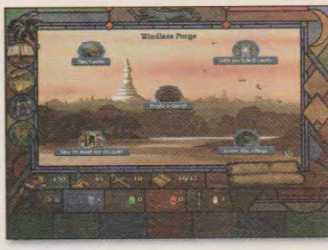
Does *Magic* have a place in a roleplaying games magazine? Er, most of you know our opinions on this already. Do computer games have a place in a roleplaying magazine? Occasionally, and only when the games covered have a direct relevance to the roleplaying hobby. Well, here we have a combination of the two. At long last MicroProse has managed to get its *Magic: The Gathering* CD-ROM out of the door, after huge complications with programming the AI routines (which is not surprising: most of us carbon-based life forms have enough problems getting to grips with the multitudinous rules of *Magic*), we can now pitch our *Magic*-playing abilities against a machine.

But the CD-ROM version of the world's most popular collectable card game is about far more than simply playing *Magic* against your PC, though that, ultimately, occupies most of your time when mucking about with it. For the 'game' itself is mainly an adventure game, taking place in the world of Shandalar, with you adopting the role of a lone wizard wandering around trying to prevent a bunch of evil wizards from taking over the land. In order to achieve this you must collect a number of spells, select those which best suit your preferred style of play, and use them to defeat other wizards in Shandalar so that you can take their spells and thus bolster your own collection.

Sound familiar? Yep, you're a planeswalker, and those spells are also cards – *Magic* cards – which you build into a deck with which to win your way through the game and through to the ultimate challenge – taking on those foul wizards which are attempting to take Shandalar for themselves. There are locations which you must visit, tasks which must be completed in order to further your goals (ie. your collection of cards, so that you can build a better deck), and villages which you can use as bases to buy food and yet more cards with which to hone your deck.

This adventure game adds a vital element to a CD-ROM based version of a game which is essentially similar to chess – there's a desire to keep on playing for more of a

A COMPLETE BEGINNER?
If you're completely new to *Magic*, the CD-ROM is a pretty good place to start. All the rules are in the manual, and there's a special tutorial which is darn good at teaching you how to play.



Here's one I built earlier

Throughout this review I've been banging on about the 'adventure game' element of the *Magic: The Gathering CD-ROM*, without really explaining what the other element is. Well, it's the Deck Builder section which enables you to create a deck using any of the cards available in the CD-ROM version and pit it against any of the decks, which have been created for the computer to use in the Shandalar game.

This is an extremely effective way of testing decks which you've created in real life before taking them out into the real world to play against friends (or in a tournament). Or, at least, it would be. Because of the limited selection of cards (4th Edition, plus cards from early expansions, and some new "Astral" cards which are unique to this version of *Magic*), you can't create the exact decks that you use in everyday play, if you use any of the recent expansions. And that's pretty likely if you're building Type II tournament decks.

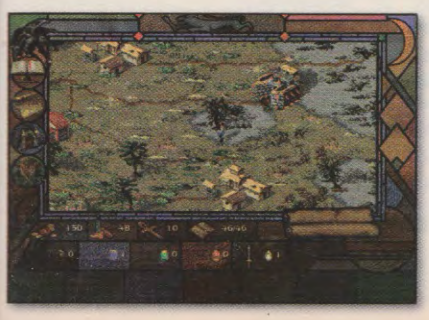
ering CD-ROM

reason than to simply get better at the core game. You're forced by the adventure game element to keep on coming back, to get one stage further, and to achieve an ultimate goal. And this makes *Magic: The Gathering* on CD-ROM eminently playable in a fashion over and above the level of *Magic's* playability with a mate. It goes beyond the mere convenience of being able to play when there's no one else to play with, it makes *Magic* a fun game to play on your own.

However, what most *Magic* players are going to be interested in is the PC's ability to actually play the core game. Is it any good, and how similarly can you expect it to play to an able, human opponent? Somewhat surprisingly, your PC can be a very good *Magic* player indeed. Not tournament level, perhaps, but on the hardest difficulty level, it's not far off. It has a good grasp of the rules (as you'd expect it to, given that this is something that can be laboriously

programmed in), and it certainly knows how to use its decks effectively.

All of the decks that the PC uses in the Shandalar element of the game have been pre-created by the programmers. Each of the many creatures that you come across has its own type of deck already determined. Therefore the PC doesn't have to do any deck construction (arguably the most difficult part of playing *Magic* well), it merely plays the rules using



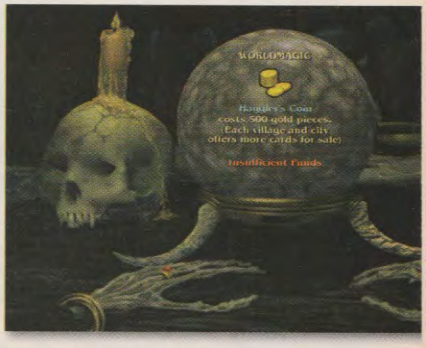
a deck which an able, human *Magic* player has already put together for it. And that kind of stacks the odds in its favour, especially in those instances when it's playing with a powerful, Type 1 deck. Because the computer has been taught how to use these decks, it should, in theory, never make a mistake, providing its understanding of the rules of the game, and every card in the game, have been programmed effectively.

But this is not the case – the PC continually makes mistakes, and at first it's easy to think that the programming is bugged. It's not, however, it's just part of the difficulty level. There are four levels of play in all, the lowest being entirely aimed at the *Magic* beginner, and the highest at the most accomplished of players. The PC deliberately makes mistakes at the lower levels of play – it'll give itself a couple of points of Mana burn, for instance, or even cast beneficial spells on your own creatures. Which is all well and good, if a somewhat clumsy means of making the game easier to win for *Magic* newbies.

What it doesn't do, however, is make deliberate mistakes in combat. In fact, it plays combat completely by the book which will, for the more able *Magic* player, make beating it a tad easier. It will never bluff (not surprising, really – getting a PC to bluff would be an extreme feat of powerful programming), and will only attack when it knows it can win (unless you've got fast effects in your hand which can tip the odds in your favour). Therefore, if it attacks with a 1/1 creature when you've got a 2/2 creature ready to block, you just know that it's got a Howl From Beyond or similar spell up its sleeve. But that's something you get used to, and the fact that it knows its decks so well still makes playing *Magic* against your PC pretty hard, especially in the Shandalar section of the game where your selection of cards is severely limited (though there are ways and means of getting precisely the cards you're after), and the PC controlled opponent already has comparatively balanced, powerful decks.

The *Magic: The Gathering CD-ROM* is, I would say, an essential purchase for *Magic* players of all levels. It's a fun way of practising your game, helping you to eliminate mistakes and to learn every nuance of the rules. It's not as much fun as pitting a deck of your own against one constructed by another human opponent, but, thanks to the additional adventure game element, it's a decent way of spending your time in between 'real' *Magic* sessions.

"The *M:TG* CD-ROM is an essential purchase for *Magic* players of all levels. It's a fun way of practising your game, helping you to eliminate mistakes and to learn every nuance of the rules."



VITAL INFO

title:	*Magic: The Gathering CD-ROM*
system:	computer game
price:	£35.99
publisher:	MicroProse/Wizards of the Coast
	01454 893 900
released:	Out now
web site:	www.microprose.com

Also available...

If you want to play *Magic* with yourself, well, you're limited to this CD-ROM, or building decks from your collection of cards and playing them off against each other (though that's nowhere near as much fun). If you want to play *Magic* against other people then you've either got to play straight *Magic*, or wait for a multi-player version of the CD-ROM, which will enable you to play against other people over the Internet.

The Final Verdict

"*Magic: The Gathering* on CD-ROM is a joy to play. The PC is a worthy opponent, though there are difficulty levels to suit all players, from the beginner to the expert. What makes the game really special is the Shandalar adventure game which gives you an excuse to keep on playing. The only downside is that the number of cards used in the game is very limited compared with the number of cards there are out there in the real world."

Paul Pettengale

Score 8/10

A Resection of Time

when a trip to Belize isn't about swimming with dolphins...

Argh! Oh how I hate *Call of Cthulhu* scenarios which have completely contrived entry points for the investigators! The 'old friend' routine I can just about handle. Winning a pair of tickets to a strange play in the odd part of town I think is pretty cool. But when the characters have to have been on an ill-fated archaeological dig a couple of years previously, in order to properly involve them in the storyline, well, that just doesn't fit too well into an on-going campaign.

VITAL INFO

A scenario for *Call of Cthulhu*
£7.95
Chaosium
001 510 547 7681
Out now
chaosium@aol.com
http://www.sirius.com/~chaosium/chaosium.html

But never mind. Let's forget for the moment that this is based upon a tournament scenario and that it therefore tries to get away with such oddities, and let's get on with looking at one of the best modern-day scenarios I've come across for *Call of Cthulhu*.

What is extremely difficult for authors of modern-day campaigns is to come up with areas of mythology which haven't yet already been completely explained away, and then to add a *Mythos* element to them. This usually involves huge amounts of research into odd tribes and ancient customs and is, therefore, something that most scenario authors make a hash of because they can't be bothered to put in the required effort. Not so in this case. It's Mayan mythology which plays the key role in the telling of this tale, and thanks to the authors' diligence, this is a scenario which fits into the modern-day despite the fact that science has now explained away most myths.

The scenario takes the investigators – who are working on behalf of a rich computer mogul and head of a research institute – from San Francisco, through LA and Arkham, and on to Belize, as they attempt to discover the whereabouts of an archaeologist whose death has, it would appear, been faked. He was working on a project in Belize, where he made a startling realisation that he felt compelled to tell the world about. However, he never got back home. The authorities thought he had, but in reality it seems he was killed near the airport by a hit-and-run driver. But this isn't true either; a later blood test showed that, while blood types matched, the blood of the deceased – who was holding the researcher's passport – did not have the distinctive strain of malaria that the archaeologist carried. The investigators are slowly drawn towards a terrible realisation of their own; namely that a dig they were working on in Mayan areas a couple of years ago holds mysteries and forgotten memories which tie the fate of the missing archaeologist to their own. Players intending to solve this mystery should skip the rest of this paragraph, but Keepers should know that a Belizean tribe is hiding members of the Mi-Go race in a cave system, a section of which the players discovered on their dig in 1994, before having their memories changed by the alien race so they could not remember anything about their discovery.

It's all very clever, and providing they haven't read this review, your players should thoroughly enjoy unravelling the mystery within the mystery. All of the characters they meet on their travels are interesting, rarely clichéd, and all add flavour to the adventures. There are plenty of handouts for the players, and the locations are distinct enough to change the pace of this mini-campaign so that it doesn't ever become stale. The book says that this should take between two and four sessions, I say four to six, but then I reckon *CoC* adventures always take longer than planned.

So, it's excellent, and Chaosium once again proves that, when it comes to printed adventures, it can knock out the best of them. It's just a shame that in order to involve players who are part of a long-term campaign the referee is going to have to do some serious fudging.

Paul Pettengale Score 8/10

Star Wars Live Action Adventures Games Masters Toolkit

Well, here's a pleasant surprise. I was somewhat underwhelmed by *Star Wars: Live Action Adventures*, but this book of referee's aids and ideas is a great improvement on it. The 'referee's primer' section contains some good, solid advice about running your first freeform game and has some notes on diceless skill resolution for people who, like me, think that rolling dice in the middle of a freeform is a silly idea.

Star Wars Live Action Adventures Games Masters Toolkit
A supplement for *Star Wars Live Action Adventures*
£9.99
West End Games
001 717 253 6990
Out now

I was less convinced of the usefulness of 'Old Mynock Freeport'; a starport/commercial centre that can be used as a setting for LARP games. It seemed to me like a generic description of a not too interesting port, with very little in the notes making it especially suited to a live action game. But the four complete, fleshed out scenarios which wind up the book, all of which are set in Mynock, are excellent. Sure, there is nothing ground-breaking in them; characters chase plot devices which very often turn out to be other player characters, a young force adept is looking for someone to train her, an evil Jedi is looking for someone to turn to the dark side, a failed Jedi is looking for a power source for his light sabre, the evil Jedi's master has got a bionic eye powered by... you get the idea. But in running a freeform, simplicity is often a virtue; complexity comes out of the players' machinations.

What you need is clear, well described characters with solid, easily grasped goals, and that is what this book provides.

Andrew Rilstone Score 8/10

Wamphyri

The most horrific and powerful creatures to inhabit this world of psychic powers and international 'ESPionage' – the vampires – are the focus of this latest supplement for *Necroscope* campaign setting.

In Brian Lumley's novels, vampires are symbiotic parasites that grow inside a human host, slowly infesting the body and twisting the mind until the two organisms are inseparably linked. The result is greater than the sum of its parts, a being of dreadful power – a Wamphyr.

The World of Necroscope book presented some basic rules for dealing with Wamphyri and vampiric infection.

Wamphyri
A supplement for *Masterbook* and the *D6* system
£11.95
West EndGames
001 717 253 6990
Out now

Wamphyri expands upon these, providing detailed new rules for the battle of wills between a vampire and its host, and a whole range of new powers and abilities unique to these deadly predators.

The book is split into three chapters and an adventure. The first chapter covers the process of vampiric infection and the changes that this brings about, the second provides new vampiric Advantages and Compensations, and the third features new skills. Running throughout these chapters is the fictional diary of an agent infected by a vampire, serving as a vivid example of the process of becoming a Wamphyr. The adventure, Monumental Problems, takes up the second half of the 96 page book, and is both epic in scope and well written. It's intended for an experienced group of *Necroscope* players, and would serve as a worthy conclusion to a campaign.

As with all of the *Necroscope* books, Wamphyri assumes that you have read at least some (and preferably all) of Lumley's *Necroscope* series. Assuming you have, this is a well designed and written book that not only captures the atmosphere of the novels, but provides solid game mechanics to model their events. This is splendidly realised and truly horrible stuff.

Andy Butcher Score 8/10

Nuwisha

If there's one thing that characterises the Garou of *Werewolf: The Apocalypse* it's their fanaticism. And like most fanatics, they lack a sense of humour. Not so their, cousins, the werecoyotes or Nuwisha.

Nuwisha
A supplement for *Werewolf: the Apocalypse*
£5.99
White Wolf
001 404 292 1819
Out now

Following hot on the heels of *Bastet*, the book on the werecats, *Nuwisha* tells all on the followers of the Trickster, first introduced in the *Werewolf Player's Guide* (and it's worth noting that you

need that supplement to use this one). Where the Garou fight the Wyrm in raging battle, the Nuwisha play pranks (usually fatal ones) to keep corruption at bay. Where Garou gain renown through great battles, Nuwisha gain it for really great gags.

The introductory comic strip nicely sets the tone, although one can't help feeling it also acts as something of a teaser for the upcoming *Werewolf: The Wild West* game. The history of the breed is nicely told in an oral-tradition style.

The description of the different manifestations of coyote broadens the scope of the book from the American West nicely, while ideas are interwoven into the text that offer ways of incorporating Nuwisha into anything from a *Mage* to a *Changeling* chronicle. Even the often redundant character templates offer new insights into the Nuwisha.

The lively writing style, interesting and well though out information and rib-tickling artwork all add up to make an extremely enjoyable and useful supplement. While nobody will be running an entirely Nuwisha-based chronicle, a werecoyote is guaranteed to liven up the dullest of *Werewolf* games.

Adam Tinworth Score 8/10

Star Wars Instant Adventures

These nine short adventures are intended for use at short notice by harassed referees. If you can flip through a book, skim a 2,000 word scenario, including maps, and then run it on the fly, you're a better ref than I am, Gunga Din.

Star Wars Instant Adventures
Scenarios for the *Star Wars* RPG
£9.99
West End Games
001 717 253 6990
Out now

Still, the scenarios are of a consistently high standard. They aren't going to win many awards for originality, but they each have a strong theme which hooks you straight away. An old friend walks up to you in a star port, mutters something about a hidden pirate treasure, and promptly drops dead. A gangster asks you to transport his boss, a wounded Hutt wanted by bounty hunters and empire alike, off planet. You are marooned on a jungle planet, and find a crashed X-Wing with a trail leading off from it.

Indeed, because they are so focused, tight, and to the point, and because they deal largely with classic *Star Wars* icons such as hutts, *X-Wings*, walkers and stormtroopers, they are arguably more fun and more true to the spirit of the game than many of West End's rather more complex outings.

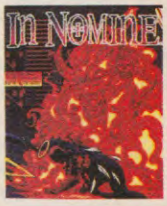
All the scenarios are intended for standard *Star Wars* character groups; rebel cells and tramp freighter crews, so you can easily plug them into on-going campaigns. There are also some colour adventure cards; cards which help you run adventures. Each scenario has some staging tips; tips on how to stage it and also include a quick-start outline, so you can start quickly.

In short, *Star Wars Instant Adventures* does exactly what it says on the label.

Andrew Rilstone Score 7/10

In Nomine Game Master Pack

There's not much to be said about this standard first supplement for a new RPG. It's a referee's screen with a booklet. The screen is a piece of cardboard with a splendidly garish Dan Smith picture on one side and a bunch of tables on the other.



In Nomine Game Master Pack
A supplement for *In Nomine*
£8.99
Steve Jackson Games
001 512 447 7866
Out Now

Since *In Nomine* is a table-light system, they've been hard put to fill the thing, and have resorted to having things like a 'Geopolitical Diagram of the Major Celestial Superiors'. This is useful, no doubt, but it's not the sort of thing GMs need in front of them all the time in play.

The booklet that comes with the screen is more interesting; a 32-page adventure. You can't help thinking this should have been in the main rulebook, where it would have worked out considerably cheaper per page and would have given some much-needed ideas of the type of games you're expected to run.

Complaints over with, however, it's a good adventure. S John Ross has managed the trick of writing a scenario which can be played whether your party is working for Heaven or Hell. Without giving too much of the plot away, it involves a bunch of celestials who have been sent to retrieve a demonic magical dagger – Hell wants it back, Heaven wants it destroyed. Each of the PCs' Superiors has their own hidden agenda for wanting to get their hands on it, which could lead to some interesting *Paranoia*-type situations as the PCs try to figure out whether they can trust each other or not.

This scenario is definitely at the dark/realistic end of the play styles

Arcane Mysteries of Barsaive

The land of Barsaive is a magical place — but does it need more spells?

A companion volume to the *Magic: A Manual of Mystic Secrets* supplement (**arcane** 6), *Arcane Mysteries of Barsaive* is a collection of new magic for FASA's *Earthdawn* roleplaying game. The book is split into three main sections, each dealing with a different form of magic, these being: Spells, Talent Knacks, and Magical Items.

The Spells section introduces more than 200 new sorceries to the game, split fairly evenly amongst the four spell-casting Disciplines of Elementalist, Illusionist, Nethermancer, and Wizard. These lists include the first published Spells of Circle 13 and higher, together with some new options to make these fantastically powerful and unique enchantments even more demanding and difficult to cast. There are also some new suggestions for dealing with the concept of Named Spells first introduced in *Magic: A Manual of Mystic Secrets.*

Talent Knacks were likewise first seen in *Magic: A Manual of Mystic Secrets,* and allow Adepts to gain 'special effects' from their existing magic-powered Talents. *Arcane Mysteries of Barsaive* includes new rules for creating custom Knacks, and descriptions of over 70 new Knacks which cover just about every Talent and Discipline in the game. Some are fairly mundane, such as Matched Weapons, which allows Swordmasters and Air Sailors with the Second Weapon Talent to use two weapons of equal size – one in each hand, of course – while others are more imaginative or obscure. By the Fingernails, for example, allows Scouts with Climbing to make a last-ditch grab for a handhold upon failing a Climbing test.

Finally, come the new magical items. These range from simple new blood charms and common items like Bedrolls of Comfort, which keep the sleeper at the perfect temperature, through Blood Knuckles, which increase unarmed combat damage, to potent Thread Items and unique treasures like the mighty sword Truefang.

VITAL INFO
A supplement for *Earthdawn*
£8.99
FASA
001 312 243 5660
Out now
http://www.FASA.com/

Arcane Mysteries of Barsaive features an impressive range of new magic for *Earthdawn,* all of it presented in the easy to follow formats standard to the game. While many of the new Spells, Knacks, and Items are fairly obvious additions, they're no less useful for it, and there are some truly imaginative, innovative and even possibly adventure-inspiring entries here.

Whether or not you should rush out and buy this book immediately, though, is more a matter of your personal taste than the quality of the contents. If you really feel that your *Earthdawn* campaign would benefit from several hundred new magical bits and pieces – perhaps your group is particularly experienced and looking for new toys, for example – then I'd recommend this very highly indeed. On the other hand, new gaming groups, or those wanting to keep things a little simpler, can safely do without it.

Andy Butcher Score 6/10

Heavy Gear Gears & Striders

nice mecha. want to show me what it can do?

With the rate of knots that the boys at Dream Pod 9 turn these out, one wonders if there's something in the water up there in Quebec. Yet more material has arrived for the roleplaying/tactical tabletop game staged on *Heavy Gear*'s highly detailed gameworld of Terra Nova in these four new releases from creators DP9. These four books are two sets of two volumes, the main set being sourcebooks that detail all the current mecha *(Heavy Gears and Striders)* that belong to Terra Nova's Northern and Southern militaries, and the other set being supplements chock full of record sheets.

The Northern and Southern Vehicles Compendiums are essentially larger, meatier versions of the original *Vehicle Field Guides*, detailing the background and stats for each and every *Heavy Gear* mech. But, whereas the *Field Guides* provided a record sheet for each unit opposite the profile, the sheets have been moved out into supplements of their own. In the two Compendiums you get the complete picture of *Heavy Gear* development on Terra Nova for each side.

Each book starts with a historical chapter on the development of the trademark Gear unit, the Hunter for the North and the Jager for the South, before launching into a mammoth machinery overview. Not only are all the basic *Heavy Gear* types showcased, but also each and every variant comes under microscopic scrutiny.

VITAL INFO

Two sourcebooks and two supplements for *Heavy Gear*
£14.99
Dream Pod 9
001 514 523 1350
Out now
http://www.dp9.com

Scores:

Northern Vehicles Compendium 1: Gears & Striders **6/10**
Southern Vehicles Compendium 1: Gears & Striders **6/10**
Northern Record Sheets 1: Gears & Striders **4/10**
Southern Record Sheets 1: Gears & Striders **4/10**

The Gear manufacturers get a chapter of profiles, as do the current research and development mecha. Weapons, Perks and Flaws are re-iterated again, though not completely, as an attempt to eliminate page-flipping, but the remainder of the book feels padded, with stats and maps for *Heavy Gear* bases being the only useable stuff. Do we really need to have the vehicle ID codes explained to us again? In addition, the pages featuring recognition charts, development genealogy, painting schemes and camouflage patterns are pretty much superfluous, although the latter two might have been useful if printed in colour instead of black and white. From a roleplaying standpoint, there's not a lot of gameable background here, though with these books, you'll never want for a foe again. For tabletop battles, on the other hand, these books possess all the minutiae you'll ever need, and some more.

As for the record sheets supplements, there's not much that can be said about them. As you would expect, they provide stats for each mech from the two Compendiums, totalling at just over a hundred units in each. The sheets are the *Heavy Gear* standard, clear and crisply printed so they should come out fine if photocopied. One downer is that the pages are not perforated or hole-punched like FASA's *BattleTech* sheets, so removal may be tricky. Another omission is that of any counters, which were bound in on the earlier *Field Guides*. While this addition would have pushed up the cost, the play value of the books would have increased greatly. As is, these are non-essential purchases.

In all, the *Gears & Striders* supplements are useful, if slightly dull products; a pronouncement that seems indicative of the more recent *Heavy Gear* releases. The roleplaying and adventure potential of Terra Nova and the *Heavy Gear* universe is becoming stagnated under waves of dense text. A return to the more dynamic feel of the earlier books is required, or else the system will merely become a number-crunching wargame with an over-done background.

Jim Swallow

suggested in the rules. The scenario begins with a major air disaster, followed by someone going mad among the survivors with a knife, not something generally considered amusing. The PCs must question the traumatised survivors if they're to achieve their aims, and the scenario doesn't pull any punches on their despair and suffering. This is not for the faint of heart.

Overall, this is a well-plotted adventure, with a piece of barely useful cardboard attached to it, and costs the usual over-the-top price for this sort of thing.

Ken Walton Score 6/10

Black Ops
A sourcebook for *Rolemaster*
£9.99
ICE
001 800 325 0479
Out now

Black Ops

The long-established fantasy game, *Rolemaster*, is trying to reinvent itself as a generic roleplaying game by producing a series of 'genre books' offering alternate settings. *Black Ops* is the first of these and is set in the contemporary world of covert operations.

The book details the clandestine extension of politics we are never supposed to see in the real world outside of Tom Clancy novels and James Bond movies. It is the world of espionage, secrets and assassinations; where trusting the wrong person will cost you your life.

The overall presentation is clear although the interior art leaves a lot to be desired, varying from average to poor. The content, after one of the most clumsy forewords ever written, is thorough on game mechanics and factual background but dry, flavourless and lacks insight into the nuances of running a game in this genre. That said, there is extensive material on the rules alterations and additions for creating *Black Ops* characters, with new professions, skills and training packages. *Rolemaster* is famous (infamous?) for its weapon tables and here delivers the details on four new ones: flamethrowers, grenades, rocket launchers and demolition charges.

The book serves well as a catalogue of specialist ammunition, pharmaceuticals and has loads of espionage equipment.

Where the book excels is on its exhaustive analysis of the world's security agencies from MI5 to Mossad and the terrorist organisations from ETA to the IRA that take up so much of their time since the Cold War ended. It is a shame *Black Ops* content and few uninspiring scenarios fail to express the excitement and drama of playing a spy.

Gary O'Connell Score 5/10

GURPS Robots

One of the cool things about roleplaying is trying to build the perfect player character. Now, thanks to *GURPS Robots*, you can make the ultimate PC, with a skin of steel and a silicon soul. This book is an intriguing combination of the design mechanics from *GURPS Vehicles 2nd Edition* and is the ultimate character generation toolbox, providing you don't mind being machine instead of man. The main part of the book is the requisite construction system which is packed with some great gizmos, and broken into two sections. The first builds your robot in a similar fashion to *GURPS Vehicles*, while the second deals with the software to run it; the skills and talents, as it were. Further on, important gaming mechanics are addressed and a full 30 off-the-peg droids are provided for instant use. *GURPS Robots* doesn't just stop there, though; *Robocop*-style cyborgs, *Blade Runner*-esque replicants, sentient Artificial Intelligences and really funky ubertech like microscopic nanobots all get good coverage.

GURPS Robots
A sourcebook for *GURPS*
£11.95
Steve Jackson Games
001 512 447 786
Out Now
sjg@io.com
http://www.io.com/s
games/

Author David L Pulver has come up with some really keen ideas on both the technology and gaming fronts. The chapters on roleplaying in a robot-oriented campaign are good but the strength of the book is the occasional stand-out concept that just begs to be integrated into a science-fiction gameworld. A construction worksheet and robot character sheet would have been a good idea, but beside that and the odd teeny error in the bibliography, *GURPS Robots* is neat. However, it's only a dedicated referee who'll use more than half of this. Death to the fleshy oppressors!

Jim Swallow Score 7/10

Operation: Elrood

The relatively nice Radell Mining Corporation is experiencing a hostile take-over bid by the extremely nasty Imperial Mining Ltd. Being the *Star Wars* universe, this take-over takes the form of attacks by pirates in the Empire's pay and terrorist bombings. The rebels decide upon entering this corporate war on Radell's side, in return for the promise of some much-needed resources. The first rebel operatives who are sent to the sector are soon kidnapped by those naughty Imperial-backed pirates. Enter the PCs.

All right, so corporate intrigue many not sound like your typical *Star Wars* adventure, but in fact the players haven't been in their meeting with their Radell Mining Corporation contact for more than about 20 minutes before a bomb goes off and it isn't long after that before they are trekking through space, encountering space dragons, and getting themselves involved in desperate battles to prevent the water world of Alluvia being decimated by an Imperial mining operation.

What impressed me most about this campaign was its line in exotic and unusual settings. We visit a planet covered in the wrecks of old space craft, whose ruler has a mobile palace salvaged from a wrecked Walker; we are attacked in serene park known as a 'thinking garden', and even take a brief detour to deliver exotic livestock to an alien zoo.

There is varied action set across many worlds, lots of aliens and far-fetched environments, chases, fire fights, even a spot of gladiatorial combat and, inevitably, a climax involving a huge space ship going bang. This is very much what a *Star Wars* scenario ought to be.

Andrew Rilstone Score 8/10

Operation: Elrood
A scenario for *Star Wars* RPG
£9.99
West End Games
001 717 253 6990
Out Now

Nasty, Brutish and Short

This new supplement on the subject of gargun (orcs) for the medieval fantasy world ought to have fans leaping up and down with glee. Harn supplements are always lovingly detailed, but sometimes tend to be a little dry – not so this one.

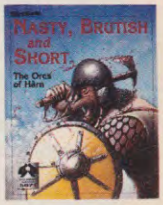
The module has the usual format, being a series of articles which can be separated and put in a ring-binder with the rest of your collection. In this case, the book contains an article on the culture, society and biology of the different species of Gargun, followed by individual articles on four different Gargun strongholds on the island. All of these have a different flavour, from small complexes dug by the orcs themselves, to huge dwarven mines taken over by the Gargun in years gone by. Artwork is the usual mix, with some fairly average illustrations and excellent, Ordnance Survey quality maps and plans.

But *Nasty, Brutish and Short* has a little extra – each Gargun complex comes with an adventure or two. Stats are for 2nd edition *HarnMaster*, but there're a couple of pages of conversion notes for those not familiar with the system. The first adventure is fairly ho-hum – hack-and-slash your way through a cave complex. But the others are more interesting, and should provide the players with plenty of surprises. They include orcs attempting to ally with human settlements, renegade mercenaries supplying arms to gargun, a complex tale of betrayal and confusion involving the Church of Agrik and the Thieves' Guild, and they culminate in a grand finale in which a renegade Shek-Pvar is trying to recreate Lothrim's empire. (Curiously enough, the same person tried that trick in a campaign I ran years ago...)

The adventures all need a fair amount of detail work by the ref, but the last one in particular could form the basis of a campaign lasting for years, if the ref feels up to it.

Altogether, a good supplement for the dedicated *Harn* fan, though newcomers may want to start with something a little less specific, such as one of the kingdom modules.

Ken Walton Score 8/10



Nasty, Brutish and Short
A Sourcebook for *HarnWorld*
£12
Columbia Games
001 360 366 2228
Out now

Milieu 0 & First Survey

The first of the standard settings for *Traveller* arrives at last.

Although originally intended as a generic science fiction roleplaying game, *Traveller* quickly developed its own unique setting, the Third Imperium, which has continued to evolve and grow over the course of the game's 20 year history.

Each of the previous editions of the game has been set in a specific period of the history of the Imperium: *Classic Traveller* during its heyday, *MegaTraveller* during its decline into civil war, and *Traveller: The New Era* in the period of re-growth after the Imperium's fall.

With the new edition of the game, though, Imperium Games decided to break away from this tradition of a fixed setting. The new *Traveller* was designed with flexibility in mind and was not tied to any one specific time period. Instead, the company announced its plans to release a variety of different campaign backgrounds set throughout the course of the third Imperium. These are known as 'Milieus'.

Milieu 0 is the first of these setting books and fleshes out the default campaign background for *Traveller*, the start of the Third Imperium. *First Survey* is a companion volume which includes full data on all the star systems in and around the fledgling Imperium.

Milieu 0 is split into eight chapters, detailing how the Third Imperium came into being, and how its growth progressed in its first few years. The book explains how new worlds were discovered and brought into the Imperium, as well as giving an overview of the internal political structure of the new empire. In addition there is a chapter of advice for referees intending to run a *Milieu 0* campaign, and every individual chapter is packed with potential adventure ideas and possible campaign threads.

There's an awful lot of information contained in *Milieu 0*, providing a fairly complete guide to the beginnings of the Imperium. However, the book does fall into the trap of assuming that its reader has a basic knowledge of how the Imperium works; in other words, it seems to be aimed more at people with previous experience of *Traveller* than at complete newcomers.

First Survey, on the other hand, is a much less inspiring affair, being simply pages of planetary data and hex maps of sectors. Admittedly, using this is a lot more convenient than generating hundreds of worlds yourself, but for the not inconsiderable price, I was hoping for a lot more; perhaps a smattering of examples of specific worlds, some more background on the sectors as a whole, and so on.

So, while *Milieu 0* and *First Survey* clearly do the job they were intended to do, it has to be said that they don't do it as well or as completely as you might have hoped, especially in the light of the delays in their release. These two books are not a bad start to the *Milieu* series, but unfortunately they're not the best, either.

Andy Butcher Scores:
Milieu 0 **6/10**
First Survey **4/10**

VITAL INFO
Two sourcebooks for *Traveller*
£14.95 each
Imperium Games
001 310 275 9859
Out now
imperiumgames@imperiumgames.com
http://www.imperiumgames.com/

Middle-Earth: Dark Minions Player Guide

ICE continues to support its Middle-earth collectable card game with this, the *Middle-Earth: Dark Minions Player Guide*. As the title makes fairly clear, this is a player's guide for the most recent *Middle-Earth* expansion set, *Dark Minions* (arcane 16), and follows largely the same format as the previous player's guides.

The book is split into three sections. The first is the Strategy Guide, which looks at the new deck design and playing strategies offered by the *Dark Minions* set and its new rules, as well as the set's effects on previous strategies. There's also an errata list, and a selection of example decks built with these new strategies in mind.

The second section features card lists for the entire *Dark Minions* set. These are conveniently arranged by card type, and include all the important game information about each card.

Middle-Earth: Dark Minions Player Guide
A players' guide for the *Middle-Earth* CCG
£6.99
ICE
001 804 295 4280
Out now

Underworld Sourcebook

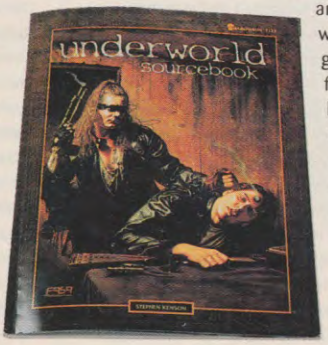
A chance to get the lowdown on *Shadowrun*'s crime syndicates – an offer you can't refuse?

Chicago-based FASA is certainly in the right place to research a supplement on mobs and gangsters, considering the infamous history of the company's home city.

If the *Shadowrun* background hadn't already infested Chicago with bugs and turned it into a containment zone, I'm sure it would have been a very suitable place to set the Family's main players in the year 2058. As it is, the game information aimed at GMs is written primarily from a Seattle-centric point of view, though the book covers the whole of the North American continent.

Like most *Shadowrun* material, referees wanting to run campaigns outside America will have to do a lot of their own work.

The Underworld Sourcebook describes in detail the 'Big Four' international crime syndicates that operate in the Shadowrun world: the Mafia, the Yakuza, the Triads and the Seoulpa Rings, as well as a variety of small-fry gangs who try to compete for turf. It covers, in detail, how these mobs operate in terms of policy and main rackets plus the state of play in the warfare between them and their internal politics. As you might imagine, the next St Valentines Day Massacre could well be around the corner and there're plenty of ways to get your player's shadowrunners caught in the crossfire. The rules for running groups of criminal characters or law-enforcement agents certainly make for a different kind of game than you might be used to. Even if you don't fancy running a campaign that is crime syndicate-based, you can use mobsters – and the worry that your fixer, fence or Johnson might be a 'Family' man – as extra incidental threats. The current situation in the *Shadowrun* universe has also added a few things for the gangs to think about. The recent assassination of the dragon Dunkelzahn caused a great upheaval and the Mobs are busy fighting over the goodies left in the wake of his passing. Added to that, the Mafia Capo in Seattle has just been successfully hit.



VITAL INFO

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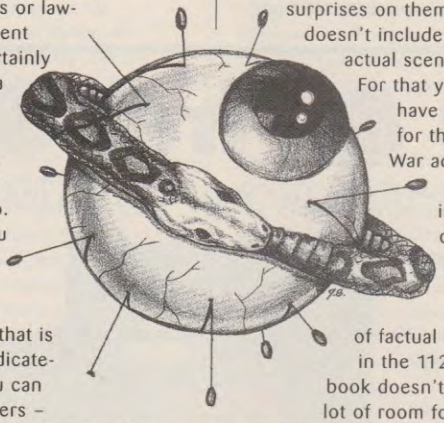


The *Underworld Sourcebook* is an excellent supplement, packed with valuable information and scenario potential. As usual, much of it is presented in the form of an online discussion which gives a variety of points of view. This means that, even if players do read it, they can't be sure exactly what is the truth and leaves the GM with plenty of scope to spring surprises on them. It doesn't include any actual scenarios. For that you will have to wait for the Mob War adventure which is due out soon. The amount of factual material in the 112-page book doesn't leave a lot of room for artwork, but that is a minor criticism. The cover art is dark, evocative and fitting, but the quality of the material used for the jacket isn't great. My copy quickly became dog-eared and the picture started to flake off.

Lucya Szachnowski Score 8/10

Finally comes the largest section, which looks at each individual card in the set in turn. Each card is pictured, and has a brief discussion of its relative usefulness, any special considerations, and tips on using it in play. Once again, although this section is very handy, and does contain a lot of solid advice, it looks a lot more impressive than it actually is, due to the fact that each card also has a 'flavour text' describing its context in Tolkien's world. Although real Tolkien buffs may find this interesting, it's of little or no use in game terms, and serves simply to double the amount of text in the section.

Once again, then, this is a solid and useful player's guide from ICE, although not particularly outstanding in any area.

Andy Butcher Score 7/10

Clanbook Cappadocian
A sourcebook for *Vampire: The Dark Ages*
£5.99
White Wolf
001 404 292 1819
Out now

Clanbook: Cappadocian

It was inevitable from the moment it became apparent that *Vampire: The Dark Ages* had an entire clan the modern game didn't, that it would show up in a clanbook. And here it is, 72 pages of detail of the clan of death. What a pity it's as dull as a corpse's conversation.

The format is a familiar one. A short story sets the scene (thankfully brief, given the writing style), then the clan's history is outlined. Next up is a look at the clan's present form, a selection of rules additions and the usual mishmash of character templates and characters of note.

Sadly, all the material is extremely average at best. The history is only mildly interesting to any but the most fanatical chronicler of the development of the Kindred. The sections on the current structure of the clan adds little to the description in the main rulebook. Only the fledgling discipline of Necromancy has anything like the potential to make the book of any real interest.

Giving the clan a premonition of their own demise is an interesting conceit, but the book fails to carry it through, lacking the necessary feeling of tragedy about the upcoming treachery of the Giovanni bloodline. The ruminations on the link between the Cappadocians and the modern day bloodline of the Samedi is strictly for die-hard *Vampire* fanboys. And the largely inappropriate art does little to aid the situation.

Given the quality of *Vampire: the Dark Ages* releases to date, this is a severe disappointment. And a disappointment that only completists will want to buy.

Adam Tinworth Score 3/10

No Disintegrations

It's not surprising that the 'bounty hunter' character template is popular with a great number of *Star Wars* players. In a universe where most of the good guys wear such very white hats (and often enough, entirely white suits to go with them) the bounty hunter is allowed to be a tough, amoral thug who solves problems by shooting at them; the typical PC, in fact.

No Disintegrations
Scenarios for the *Star Wars* RPG
£9.99
West End Games
001 717 253 6990
Out now

This book contains five adventures for referees running campaigns where all the player characters are bounty hunters. They are a fairly decent bunch of adventures, bringing as much originality to the subject matter as could be expected. Your would-be Bobba Fetts get to rescue the bride-to-be of a local crime lord and retrieve a sacred artifact as well as being presented with some opportunities to undertake more orthodox hits on the likes of terrorists and murderers.

The most interesting scenario is the last; not particularly for its content (a noble hires the players to bump off a casino owner who cheated him out of a fortune) but for its structure. There's a basic introduction, a time line showing the movements of the quarry and a rival bounty hunter, and descriptions of various locations to which the chase will take the players. This works much better for this sort of adventure than the more plotted approach used elsewhere and could almost serve as a template for referees on how to design and run bounty hunter campaigns.

Traveller and *D&D* characters used to spend most of their time hanging around bars hoping that mysterious 'patrons' would give them missions. And that's what bounty hunters will be doing, too. Typical player characters in typical RPG adventures. It may say *Star Wars* on the cover of this adventure pack, but most of these adventures could be happening anywhere.

Andrew Rilstone Score 7/10

Indiana Jones and the Sky Pirates

Indiana Jones and the Sky Pirates
supplement for *The World of Indiana Jones*
price tba
West End Games
001 717 253 6990
Out now

This scenario supplement is very heavily based on three *Indiana Jones* novels; *Indiana Jones and the Peril at Delphi*, *Indiana Jones and the Unicorn's Legacy* and *Indiana Jones and the Sky Pirates*. The first three chapters cover the plots and personalities that appear in each of the books, provide background information on the places mentioned, suggest ways that the stories can be adapted for roleplaying adventures and introduce hooks to get player characters involved. After this come two complete mini-adventures which follow on from the events of the fiction. All this is useful if you are a fan of the novels but of limited value to a referee who hasn't read them.

The adventures themselves are full of outrageous coincidences and more clichés than you can crack a bullwhip at, the plots are also about as linear as that line on the map when Indy takes a sub to the Nazi hide-out. Escape from death leads breathlessly to fight scene, leads to tip-off from dodgy dealer, leads to yet another fight scene, leads to trap-filled temple, leads to one more fight scene, leads to supernatural event where the bad guys get their comeuppance... Phew! But that's all stock-in-trade for the genre isn't it?

The artwork, design and production quality are generally good, but the supplement could have done with a thorough proofread. At the pivotal point of one cliff-hanger scene we are told: "Failure to hang on results in one very messy (and very fatal) splat."

Not highly recommended.

Lucya Szachnowski Score 6/10

Tales of the Jedi Companion
A background book for the *Star Wars* RPG
£15.99
West End Games
001 717 253 6990
Out now

Tales of the Jedi Companion

The Old Republic was the Republic of Legend. So began the novelisation of the first *Star Wars* movie. But that isn't enough for you, is it? You want more; real, hard, factual information about the time when the Jedi guarded Peace and Justice, before the Dark Times, before the Empire...

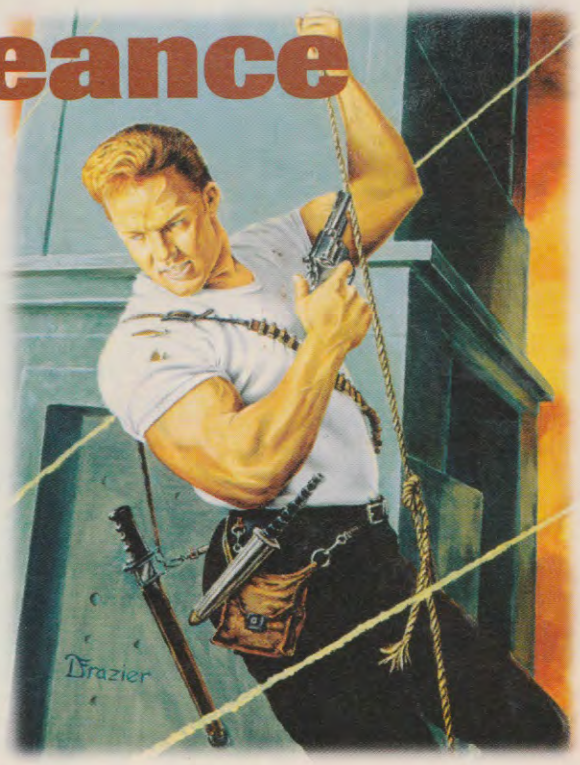
This misconceived book, based on the comics of the same name, tries to fulfil some of this natural curiosity. It is set 4,000 years before the first *Star Wars* movie, when space travel was far slower and blasters had not yet been invented. Heroes have to make do with things called pulse wave weapons instead. So, with the Jedi still a going concern, everything is Peaceful and Just, right? Well, actually not. Seems that a thousand years ago some Jedi Knights shacked up with a race called the Sith and were consumed by something even darker than the dark side of the force. Which is pretty dark, I guess. They were defeated by the nice Jedi but some of their evil knowledge survived. And now, old evils resurface, dark time for the galaxy, do not underestimate the power of the dark side, blah, blah, blah.

Even if you don't agree with me that the whole concept of this book obliterates the mystique of the greatest movie ever made, I question its value as an RPG setting. Sure, a game in which all the PCs were Jedi Knights might be fun. Come to think of it, it might be called *GURPS: Lensmen*. But does the tedious trawl presented here through the characters, weapons, spaceships and aliens races from the comic book really help us to run it? Fans of the comic – and presumably there were some – will possibly find it interesting stuff if they've always hankered to run a game set in that milieu. Aside from that, this is another supplement that's for completists only.

Andrew Rilstone Score 3/10

Extreme Vengeance

fancy a starring role in an all-action movie? read on.



VITAL INFO
A roleplaying game
price tba
Archangel Entertainment
001 414 248 7189
Out now

OK, all the wimps out there can stop reading right now. You sensitive types can go play with your White Wolf games. This one is strictly for manly men and manly girls.

Think that Arnie and Sly would be cool if they weren't such wimps? Well this is your chance to do it right. In this game, each PC is a Feature Role in an action film trying to pull off the biggest stunts and rack up the biggest body count while the Director determines how cool they look.

Sure, there are rules but this is a simple, robust system for simple, robust people. The only two statistics are Guts and Coincidence (Luck) and what else does a man need? Each hero has his own Repertoires like Dramatic Slo-Mo or Catch Phrase so they can play a scene just the way they want. You get as many dice as you have Guts or Coincidence to split between all your actions in a turn and action rolls are modified by Excitement Level, the wilder the stunt the more dice you get! Dice still need to be rolled but the heroes can load them to ensure the action flows. And the action should flow as one roll determines success or failure, the damage done and the Popularity gained (yeah, yeah, I'm coming to that. What are you, late for your own funeral, or something?).

Of course, tough guys get preferential treatment because otherwise they wouldn't win (pay attention at the back, there, geek!). Featuring Roles and Villains walk out of collapsing buildings with only a torn shirt and broken sunglasses. The Supporting Cast need a good kicking to put them down and Extras die like flies. There are no detailed equipment lists for the anoraks out there – just Guns, Big Guns, Bigger Guns and Really Big Guns. Look, you pull the trigger, people explode, what else do you need to know? Best of all, the Director determines audience reaction and hairy chest action is rewarded with the big gains in Popularity rather than experience points. Players are encouraged to shamelessly grandstand for Popularity gains which not only make them tougher but also get them into bigger films.

Rules are illustrated by Takes and summarised as Dailies. The author uses an informal, flowing style with just the right level of irreverent humour and lots of examples from the movies. There are no pretensions but plenty of wit and style for those who like that kind of thing. This is designed for quick, high power bursts and provides a perfect tonic for more sustained campaigns.

This is big, cheap, dumb fun designed for big, cheap dumb men and women. If you need to know any more, this ain't the game for you. Is it as good as *Feng Shui*? Well, no, but it *is* different. Definitely worth a look.

Mark Barter Score 7/10

Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay

It was deeper and darker than the chaos spiky death wargame that spawned it. And it ain't dead yet. Dan Joyce remembers.

Designed by Richard Halliwell, Rick Priestly, Graeme Davis, Jim Bambra & Phil Gallagher
Published in 1986 by Games Workshop

In 1986, Games Workshop made a pivotal decision: they launched their own roleplaying game, *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*. Until then they'd re-printed RPGs from other companies under licence. *WHFRP* was their own. It wasn't radically better than, or different from, anything that came before, but it did get plenty of support thanks to Workshop's magazine, White Dwarf. *Warhammer* and White Dwarf were like *AD&D* and Dragon, until the game was dropped in the early '90s, when Workshop got out of the RPG market altogether.

It's sort of ironic that *WHFRP* was dropped in favour of the more lucrative wargames market, because wargames are where it began. In 1983 Citadel launched *Warhammer: The Mass Combat Fantasy Role-Playing Game*. In fact, what it was was a set of rules for running fantasy battles, with only the third of the three volumes dealing with roleplaying. As a roleplaying system, *Warhammer TMCFRPG* sucked wind. It was only really of any use if you wanted to splice roleplaying sessions into your campaign of pitched battles.

Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay set out to change all this. Instead of a slim supplement, Workshop produced a hefty 350+ page softback book. To retain cross-compatibility, the core rules were still based on the original wargame. This potential strength, the ability to switch seamlessly from mass combat to one-on-one roleplaying, was, and still is, *WHFRP*'s greatest weakness. It's an ugly game. It runs like a reconditioned car, with the attention given to the bodywork and upholstery instead of the engine.

Characters are rated not via the usual half-dozen stats, but on: Move, Weapon Skill, Ballistic Skill (Missiles), Strength, Toughness, Wounds, Initiative, Attacks, Dexterity, Leadership, Intelligence, Cool, Will Power, and Fellowship. To make matters confusing, some of these are rated out of a hundred, some out of ten, and some have no maximum.

For instance, an average Elf might have a Strength of 3 and an Initiative of 61. A Giant would have a Strength of 7 and an Initiative of 20. Does that make him two and a third times as strong as the elf and one third as fast? I'm none the wiser for having played the game.

Skills and combat are percentage based, with combat using a D6 for damage resolution. Wounds are just a buffer zone, though. Nothing serious happens until you get to zero, at which you take your ch: *Rolemaster*-style critical hit table. It's a functiona even allowing for hit locations – but it takes a bit of swallowing if you're used to, say, *RuneQuest* or *GURPS*.

The skills you have are determined by one of *WHFRP*'s strong points: your career. A career isn't just a character class. You can *change* careers to improve skills or characteristics, or pick up new ones. It's easiest to change careers if you follow a logical path. For instance, a Scribe might become a Forger, a Lawyer, a Merchant or a Scholar. But it is possible to switch to completely different careers – a Labourer could become a Wizard's Apprentice or a Thief.

It's a novel system, and there are over 100 careers listed. If you want to try out Andrew Rilstone's idea of playing a less-obviously-heroic character for a change, play *WHFRP*: you could be a Herdsman, a Fisherman, a Pedlar, a Student, or even a Rat-catcher. High adventure ahoy!

Actually, the fact that there is a broad range of careers helps suspend your disbelief in *WHFRP*'s setting, The Old World. It's not just a world of heroes and nefarious villains like Hyperborea; it's a world of normal people too, making the lurking horror of Chaos seem stronger. We said in **arcane** 14 that *WHFRP* is a kind of cross between *AD&D* and *Call of Cthulhu*. For this blend to work you need a detailed, believable world, and strongly plotted scenarios. Fortunately, that's just what Games Workshop provided.

For all that The Empire, a kind of early-renaissance Germany, contains your stereotypical Elves, Dwarves and Halflings, its background feels richer than most fantasy campaign settings. The inhabitants aren't new, the pantheon of gods isn't anything special, the written history is straightforward, and yet... you get the feeling someone at Games Workshop really believed in this game and its world.

"In Warhammer FRP you could be a Herdsman, a Fisherman, a Pedlar or a Rat-catcher. High adventure ahoy!"

The premier example of all this is *The Enemy Within*, a big campaign with all the right elements for a *WHFRP* game: Chaos, politics, thieves, demons, bodies in sewers – and the whole civilised Empire, no less, on the brink of collapse. I was lucky enough to go through most of this as a player, and it's still the best time I've had as a player. Since Hogshead have resurrected *Warhammer* and its world, I now look forward to running *The Enemy Within* as a referee.

It's true that in game mechanics terms *WHFRP* is nothing special. In fact it's downright chaotic, ugly and spiky. But damn me if there isn't a seed of greatness in this game – mostly in its setting. The Empire is a place I'll certainly come back to, probably armed with a copy of *Call of Cthulhu* or *GURPS* and some hastily scribbled conversion notes. Can't wait.

CHAOS NEVER SLEEPS

You can still buy the classic *Enemy Within Campaign*, as Hogshead have re-printed it under licence. We reviewed part of it, Death on the Reik, in arcane 15 and gave it 9/10.

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The Legend

A swashbuckler, a mystic, a romantic, a resistance fighter. Ian O'Rourke looks at the many faces of one of the greatest heroes of all time.

Robin the Swashbuckler
Gisburne: "Do you know any prayers, my friend?"
Robin: "I'll say one for you!"

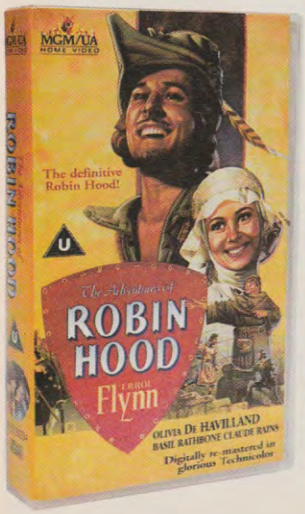
Robin the Mystic
"This isn't an ordinary fight; it's not arrows and swords. This is a fight between the powers of Light and Darkness."

The Legend of Robin Hood is timeless. The hero who stole from the rich and gave to the poor, who battled against tyranny despite overwhelming odds, and who fell in love with the beautiful Maid Marion can transcend his native genre and setting to appear anywhere. Through three very different incarnations of the story, we are going to discuss the Legend of Robin Hood to see what it has to offer our roleplaying campaigns.

Buckling The Swash

The film *The Adventures of Robin Hood* captures the mood of a swashbuckling playing style perfectly. It pays enough detail to the legend's historical setting and

***The Adventures of Robin Hood* directed by Michael Curtiz and William Keighley, 1938**
Errol Flynn plays the perfect swashbuckling hero and Basil Rathbone is excellent as Sir Guy of Gisburne in a film that is true to the tradition of the Legend. It ends with a brilliant final battle as King Richard returns and Robin battles Sir Guy. All referees wanting to run a swashbuckling campaign of any type should watch it.



***Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* directed by Kevin Reynolds, 1991**
The least historically accurate of the three, but a good film all the same. Kevin Costner makes an effective Robin who returns from the Crusades to find he must fight for his father's honour and lands. Good acting and direction make the romance between Marion and Robin very effective.

conflicts to seem realistic, in spite of the garish costumes and swords that come from a later time period.

The heroic Errol Flynn and Basil Rathbone's Sir Guy of Gisburne conduct one of the best sword fights in the history of cinema, as they do battle throughout Nottingham Castle. This is the stuff that great campaigns are made of. Just remember to use a system that is not too realistic but allows the players to conduct themselves with panache and without fear of being killed.

The *Star Wars* RPG system is perfect for a swashbuckling Robin Hood. It could even be said that *Star Wars* is Robin Hood on a galactic scale. Imagine the Sheriff as an Imperial Moff and Sir Guy of Gisburne as a military commander charged with hunting down the rebels. We don't want to limit the panoramic nature of *Star Wars* to a single planet, so the characters can hide in a nebula that disables sensors. The campaign can then begin with characters raiding ships, integrating themselves into the area and weaving a web of contacts as they fight the tyranny of the Empire. They can end by saving the day with the aide of the New Republic.

Action based games like *Feng Shui* and *Deadlands* also provide excellent vehicles for a swashbuckling campaign. In *Feng Shui*, the game could take place in the AD69 juncture with the local despot as a supernatural being, such as a ghost or an ancient Chinese demon. The scene would be set for lots of adventures involving martial arts, mysteries and mysticism. In *Deadlands*, the characters could be protecting the local farmers and towns from the evil, rich ranch owner, or from the syndicate controlling the water and community bank loans.

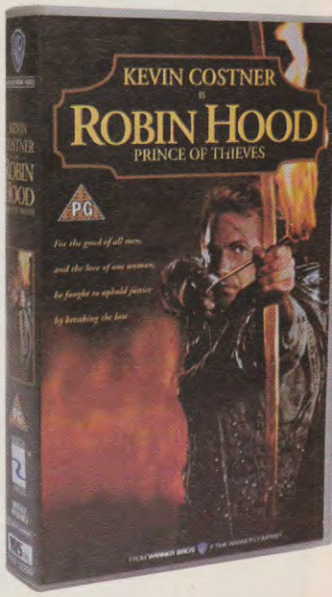
A similar idea was used the film *Young Guns* where Billy the Kid was made into a Robin Hood type figure. This theme can be extended to make the evil rancher truly devilish by applying the supernatural content within the *Deadlands* campaign world.

There is also nothing to prevent the outlaws leaving their hiding place once in a while to have a go at being The Magnificent Seven, as happened in the *Robin of Sherwood* episode *The Seven Swords of Wayland*. Here Robin and Merrye Men leave Sherwood to protect a village from apparently supernatural raiders. In *Deadlands*, of course, they may well be truly supernatural.

Myths and Magic

Robin of Sherwood provides a mystical approach to the legend and is one of the most original interpretations ever to be seen. The fact that it was a TV series also allowed it to explore certain themes and moods over several seasons.

Here, Robin is actually a figure whose coming was prophesied centuries ago by Gildas the Monk. Symbolically speaking, he is the son of Herne the Hunter, a pagan god of the time, and is charged with defending the weak and oppressed. Robin had a magical sword, one of



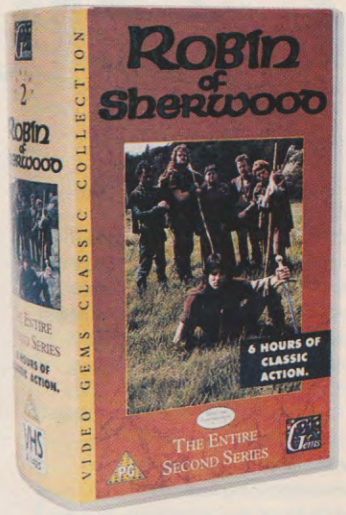
the seven swords of Wayland. This sword very rarely actually did anything magical, though in the episode *The Seven Swords of Wayland*, a group of Satanists did bring the swords together to try and bring Satan to Earth. Robin also had a sorcerous nemesis in the form of the Baron De'Belleme. The Silver Arrow often associated with the Robin Hood legend was magical, being an ancient pagan symbol of England.

Anyone running a *Pendragon* campaign should watch the first two series of *Robin of Sherwood* to see how magic is handled. It is always simple, effective and atmospheric, never grand and explosive like *AD&D* magic. The magic enhances the setting rather than detracts from the very medieval feel of the show as it simply assumes that some of the beliefs of the time were true. This is exactly how magic in the *Pendragon* world should be implemented.

Robin of Sherwood also demonstrates how to handle the geographically restrictive nature of a Robin Hood game. This is an advantage, as developing the locations and characters within a certain campaign area gains you

# of Robin Hood

Robin of Sherwood **created by Richard Carpenter, 1984**
Due to the loss of Michael Praed at the end of the second season, only the first two of these three TV series are really worth watching. Praed plays an excellent Robin as a prophesied mythical figure in a mystical England with highly effective low–key magic and a realistic setting. The best version of Robin Hood ever.



For those of you with cable television, *Robin of Sherwood* is currently showing on the Cable channel Carlton Select.

depth for what you lose in breadth. Your characters, whether *Star Wars* heroes in a nebula, or Saxon outlaws in a forest, should become integrated into their surroundings. There they will make allies, enemies and contacts who should interact and change as the characters influence the region. The odd adventure based away from their immediate region could also take place, just don't make a habit of it; these should be special.

The *Ars Magica* system, with its Mythic Europe setting, would allow for the more magical ideas in *Robin of Sherwood* to be explored. You could run adventures featuring only the outlaws, or involve the Mages directly. If the outlaws are NPCs, one of them could be related to one of the Mages, forcing a connection to the Covenant beyond any geographical link. The Covenant would obviously take some backlash from the people hunting the outlaws and will then have to decide to sacrifice morals for magical power, or try and walk the thin line between the two sides. The issue of risking your life for what you believe in can be explored. This is especially true as the Mages cannot just up and move their Covenant; they are compelled to deal with the situation.

Everything I Do

In a fashion typical of American blockbusters, *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* removed a lot of the detail. The film does not mention the Saxon and Norman conflict, and King John does not seem to exist. Instead, it concentrates more on the personal conflict between Robin and the Sheriff, who is trying to take the throne. Sir Guy of Gisburne has little part to play in the proceedings, and is in fact killed by the Sheriff halfway through the film.

The character of Robin is, however, quite original. Errol Flynn's Robin was a brash and bold hero from the beginning, Michael Praed's was naive and young but strong of character and slowly grew up over the first two series, Kevin Costner's Robin is someone who enters the story a changed man.

It is established that he became a spoilt noble's child after the death of his mother, but left to fight in the Crusades and came back an adult. He returns to find his father destroyed by the Sheriff of Nottingham.

This is a good premise for a campaign. One character would be the son of a noble who went away to war only to return to find his family dead and some despot ruling from his castle. The campaign would develop from there, with the character finding the outlaws in the forest and persuading them to follow him. He would then begin to protect his citizens and harass the despot with the hope of retaking his castle. The campaign would conclude with him regaining his birthright. This campaign theme is a heroic one, with lots of potential.

Prince of Thieves also highlights the gradual romance between Robin and Marion, who is surprised by the changes in her lover. One of the questions the film raises is what you will do for love, and whether it is important enough to die for.

This theme continues throughout the movie, with Marion deciding to help Robin get a message to the King because of her love for him, rather than for her loyalty to the Crown. Robin later decides he is prepared to die for Marion and leads a rescue attempt during which Marion and most of Robin's men are captured. Exploring this issue in a game would be very interesting. What is a character willing to do to save the ones he loves?

Rob the Rich

Whatever type of campaign you are running, in whatever genre and with whatever system, there is always room for effective conflict, romance and tragedy. Indeed, this is what good stories are comprised of. The Robin Hood legend has them all, and by looking at the legend in its may forms, you can learn how to use these elements in your campaigns.

Robin the Romantic

Robin: "You're King Richard's cousin, you can get word to him of Nottingham's plan. He would believe you."
Marion: "If the Sheriff found out, I could lose all that I have."
Robin: "True, but would you do it for your King ?"
Marion: "No. But I'll do it for you.

arcane scribblings

Open can of worms, decant into a non-metallic container, and consume within one month.

Fawning fan first

I picked up the Christmas issue and it was wonderful. The reviews, the Top 50 games and the articles were all excellent. I stopped buying game mags after I began to think *Dragon* was going downhill, in about 1992. I plan on subscribing to **arcane** now, though. Good job!

Seneca Mickelson, Connecticut

Cheers. What puzzles me is how it took a copy of **arcane** *two or three months to get to Connecticut. You can fly there in a matter of hours. If you go on Concorde you can arrive before you set off. I think.*

American Express?

arcane is hard to find in the USA. Our local hobby store gets a few copies, as does Barnes & Noble, but not on a reliable schedule. They're usually sold out within a few days and are an issue behind those released in the UK.

I inquired about a subscription but was told they only accepted payment in pounds, and wouldn't accept Mastercard or Visa. I would gladly buy a three-year subscription if I could pay for it with Visa. Anyway, I haven't bought an issue since **arcane** 7; too much hassle involved.

Catherine, via e-mail

That's odd. We do accept Visa, Mastercard, envelopes stuffed with high denomination, untraceable notes in any currency (best send those to the office – for safety, like). Pretty much anything, except electrum pieces.

Linear plots

Why do you always complain about linear adventures and scenarios? I mean, as long as a campaign isn't too clichéd or restricted, what's wrong with a linear plotline? After all, most fantasy novels have a generally linear story. More importantly, the PCs can often become confused and disoriented when the plot is non-linear. The point is, just because it's linear, doesn't mean you should bag it. Some people like linear adventures.

Steven Darlington, Brisbane

Andy and I were talking about this. Andy said: "Linear adventures deny players freedom of choice, and the appeal of roleplaying over non-interactive fiction is that players can make their own decisions and aren't, or shouldn't be, forced into a specific plotline. In our opinion."

I'd qualify this by saying that it doesn't matter if it's a linear plot if the players don't know it's a linear plot and don't find out. I mean (beardy philosophy bit alert) your own real life could be planned out in advance, and you wouldn't know, would you? A philosophy lecturer who was into Determinism once told me that all choice is illusion.

He was wrong, of course. I chose to spend the next morning in bed and not go to his lecture. As a test.

Rilstone wrong!

Regarding Andrew Rilstone's 'It's Character Building' article (**arcane** 17), I must protest that while you can take characters straight off the peg in the *Star Wars* RPG, it's also possible to design characters around a basic dice-allocation system. Indeed, this is how most of our current characters have been fashioned.

Len Oil, via e-mail

Andrew didn't say you can't *design characters like that in* Star Wars, *only that the game uses templates.*

Lack of *Visions*

Some of the decks in the free book and the 'My Deck' article (**arcane** 17) were great but it would have been useful if you'd put expansion symbols next to the names of the cards. It might also be useful if you could put alternative cards that could be used instead, such as Red Elemental Blast for Pyroblast. Also, where were the *Visions* lists in the free book? I had seen the cards in the shop before the mag came out, so you should have had time to produce price lists.

Andrew Wedge, Lancs

Magazine production takes place further ahead than you might think. I'm typing this – one of the last things to be sorted in the whole issue – on April 3rd. You won't read it until April 25th. Most articles were in about three weeks ago (mid-March), and they were commissioned back in February.

This lead time is why Visions *wasn't on the price list – it wasn't on sale when we did it, so there was no secondary market for* Visions *cards.*

Labyrinthe lather

To be honest, I was surprised your letters page didn't have more comments on the *Magic* combo feature in **arcane** 14. I agree with Jan E Snorman (real name?) that they were crap; several of them didn't even work. And the prices quoted in the guide, where did they come from? Labyrinthe is the biggest mail-order single *Magic* card trader in Britain, if not Europe, and your price guide is in no way similar to ours (and aren't you supposed to list the sources as a legal requirement?).

The combos did all work for a change, but they still weren't all that good, with some deck listings being decidedly dodgy (and doesn't *Visions* become legal in Type II tournament play 30 days after its release, not one 28-day month?)

The *Magic* feature in the magazine itself was okay, but lacked useful advice such as filling in sanction paperwork as you go along rather than afterwards. As for the 'old' Type II deck listing, this deck is a year out of date! What was the point of that? Not up to the usual high standard we've all come to expect from **arcane**.

Ian, Labyrinthe

The price guide was just that – a guide. Of course it won't correspond to yours, and of course you'll be able to get many cards at different prices. That's the nature of guides. Even Labyrinthe's. I think you quote Fireballs at 20p each (or is it 10?). I can get them for 3p. Does that invalidate your price guide?

More CCGs

Contrary to popular belief, there are no easily available CCG mags in the UK. The only two I've come across are American and can only be got via specialist shops, so it makes perfect sense to incorporate CCGs into **arcane**. I hope this continues as I'm sure I'm not the only person who buys **arcane** purely for its CCG content.

Hadji, via e-mail

No, you're not. Though the majority of our readers play CCGs and RPGs.

More miniatures

In **arcane** 16, the results of your readers' poll showed that 54% of your readers play miniature systems, yet the space you donate to this hobby is nil.

I know what you're going to say: *'White Dwarf* covers all that'. Well, there's a lot more to tabletop gaming than just Games Workshop.

What about a themed version of the old Hot Metal section? Each month, take an army and showcase figures by other figure manufacturers (such as Harlequin, Heartbreaker, Grenadier and Ral Partha), which would fit into a GW-style army. These manufacturers make good figures at a fraction of the GW price.

communication

If you'd like to get in touch with **arcane** *there are several ways. The most traditional is to send us a letter clearly marked '***arcane** *scribblings' and addressed to* **arcane**, *30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW. The slightly more technically advanced among you can send us a fax on (01225) 732252, while all you fully-fledged InfoCyberOtakuNauts out there can e-mail us at:*

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We look forward to hearing from you.

Sage advice

A wise woman speaks

Please allow a little old lady of 56 to say a few words to three of your correspondents. First, to Ms Catherine Hope: if you find shop assistants offensive, try mail order! There are plenty around and they are always friendly, courteous and helpful. The shops I have been in have never made me feel odd and I've never once been asked if I'm shopping for my son (or even grandson!), nor if I'm waiting for someone else.

Second, to Andrew from Australia: give up gaming because you're too old? I've been playing or refereeing on and off for the last 17 years or so. I started late, but have no intention of stopping until the dice stop rolling.

Third, Mr A Townsend: get off your arse, man, and get yourself to a convention! Yes, there are cliques, as in every hobby, occupation and in life in general. Yes, there are ignorant toe-rags. Yes, there are elitists. And yes, you will find examples of all the above at every convention, but these are still the best places to meet people, get into games (if you ask nicely), make contacts and have fun. If all else fails, stick a notice up in your local library or independent bookshop. There are a hell of a lot of older players who appreciate a bit of maturity in their games. You will find them at conventions and most of them are willing and able to give encouragement to virgins.

Jan, Surrey

PS: Keep up the conventions diary!

The other good thing about conventions is that you can carry on a game into the middle of the night without disturbing anyone or having to worry about work the next day. Sometimes the bar stays open too.

Let these be the last words (except for the rest of this letters' page) about women in shops or people called Mr A Townsend, subjects about which we've had far too many letters to print.

Or look at fantasy rules systems such as Grenadier's *Fantasy Warriors, Leviathan* by Grendel and *Raven* by Harlequin, which you still haven't even reviewed.

And feature figures produced for the 'ancient' period wargamers. Some of these fit in brilliantly with Barbarian or Empire type armies and the quality of these figures has improved tremendously in recent years. My Wood Elf army uses chariots converted from ancient British chariots produced by Old Glory for £3.

I'm not knocking GW (honest), but there are plenty of alternatives which I'm sure your readers would like to know about. If I, as a non-*Magic* player (actually I play *Heresy)* have to have it rammed down my throat every month in **arcane**, how about some miniatures coverage?

Mark Jarvis, London

Prospective miniature writers should grab a pen (if it's not too big) and get in touch with me, Dan, at the usual address (see left).

Whether we'd have a dedicated miniatures page (or pages) is up for debate. Even if the answer's 'no', I'm pretty sure we could run articles along the lines of 'how to incorporate wargaming into roleplaying', for those occasions when you have wars in your campaign world.

More PBM

I was sorry to see you drop the PBM column. It's the main reason why my husband and I have got a subscription. Yes, we like the tone and presentation of **arcane**, but we've been working in PBM for years now, so the column was important to us.

However, you say you're looking for ways to continue presenting the subject. I suggest that you could choose between a regular columnist, comparisons of games on a particular theme (rather than straight reviews), game diaries and demos, and readers' comments about the games they play. Just describing games doesn't work well; it's much more interesting to have some idea of what games are like in play.

Finally, your news item 'Fair Game' (**arcane** 18) is misleading in that the seven PBM firms listed, apart from KJC Games, are all football-only firms. There's a whole host of other perfectly reliable PBM moderators out there.

Carol Mulholland, via e-mail

The news item is our mistake. We should have looked into it further to present a more detailed report but, as ever, we were pushed for time and didn't. Sorry.

Your PBM suggestions are good. Expect to see PBM in the magazine again soon.

Shop staff

Catherine Hope isn't the only one to have a bad time in games shops. I regularly get odd looks and disparaging comments when I go into a shop in my work clothes: a suit. Some shops seem to object to anyone, male or female, who doesn't fit their image of 'gamers'. For even more hassle, try going into some shops with a four year-old daughter!

A Suit, via e-mail

Chelsea Girl

I can understand what Catherine Hope (**arcane** 17) means, but what has to be remembered is that the staff don't see a lot of girls in their shops, for whatever reason. On the few occasions I have been into Chelsea Girl, I have been given equally odd looks from the staff. And you notice how Chelsea Girl hire mainly female staff? Same thing. But there's no prejudice involved; everyone thinks it's great when a girl joins the hobby.

Steve Tierney, Hemel Hempstead

My advice: never wait for your better half in Chelsea Girl (or similar). A man uncomfortably lurking in a women's clothes shop can be seen as Even Weirder than a man who wears a T-shirt saying 'I am a roleplayer (you know, D&D)'. I imagine.

Dear Mr A Townsend of Hastings

How would you like to join a club of fresh, enthusiastic, friendly roleplayers in the Eastbourne area? You would? Great! I'm the chairman of the Worlds Apart Roleplaying Club in Eastbourne and I hereby extend an invitation to you to visit our club on any Tuesday night you wish from 6.30pm to 11pm. Give me a ring on 01435 867735. I can assure you that you won't be disappointed.

Tony Burgess, Worlds Apart

Giggling sticks

One enlightening phrase in Mr A Townsend's letter was the description of sad elitists "giggling like faggots". As I've yet to hear a bunch of sticks giggle, I take this as an offensive swipe at gay men.

I have known many roleplayers, gay and straight, and I cannot for the life of me see what difference it makes to anything. There's enough bigoted crap written about RPGs and I find it sad when roleplayers do the same. I'm also surprised **arcane** didn't challenge this kind of rubbish. I'm sure it wouldn't have appeared if the reference had been to race or gender.

Stephen Pettifer, Dudley

No, it wouldn't. We wouldn't have printed 'giggling like gay blokes' either. We sort of assumed he wasn't using 'faggots' in a specific sense, more as a general insult, in the same way that someone who leans out of a car window and shouts 'bastard!' isn't really casting aspersions on someone's parentage. Sorry if we were wrong.

Death by killing

I have a question about the *Star Wars* RPG's wound table. If you have, say, a strength of 3D+2 and you have two stuns, and the next two shots that hit you result in a wound, and you are mortally wounded as a result, does that mean you're dead?

Ron 'Max' Munar, overseas

I don't know about Star Wars, *but mortal wounds are usually fatal. Otherwise they're not mortal wounds, are they?*

arcane shorts

Snippets of wisdom and wonder.

Terris is the best MUD in the known world. Look out for me in the game. I'm Griko the mad half-troll berserker. Me hit fings 'ard till they no move.

Griko, mad half-troll berserker

Encounters are great, but could you write one for *Star Wars*, as you haven't included this in issue 18's Encounters booklet?

Adam Seabridge, Newquay

We did. Please re-read, looking out for the key words 'Star' and 'Wars', especially on page 26.

Could you produce a book of all the Encounters in one time-zone as a campaign? You could easily add a set of rules and put in stats for the NPCs. If you do, can I have a free copy?

Andrew Wedge, Lancs

But you could do that. That's what Encounters are for.

I was looking through your *Magic* price guide wondering what the most expensive card was when I saw the Black Lotus at £275-£325. Is this true or are you having me on?

Owen Norton, Huddersfield

It's true. Consequently we don't have one handy. It's just a flower anyway.

I enjoyed seeing *Living Steel* getting a mention in the Retro column. I especially liked the notion that the harder the system is, the more likely the referee is to chuck it and simply roleplay.

Anthony J Gallela

Brian Gillatt's formula (**arcane** 18) could not work because it has a negative after a square root, and if there are no dice on the table and no women present then you're in big trouble as well.

Gary, via e-mail

Mathematicians. Love 'em.

Though your mag may scare some old timers off with its gloss, in time they will see the error of their ways and take a peek at this wonderful offering from our brothers across the whale road. I am impressed.

Ben Stigar, America

free reader ads

Of course, to anyone else these pages would be absolutely unintelligible...

A number of readers have asked whether they have to actually cut the coupon out of their copies of **arcane** *to get their ad published. Of course you don't. As long as we get your ad, we'll fit it in, somehow. Whether you've bought the magazine, or whether you're some cheesy tightwad 'student' who photocopies everything out of your mates' copies, we recognize that things like reader ads carry a global importance that far outweighs any practical or financial considerations we may, or may not, have. It's a 'one-world' thing...*

RPGs

● Original *AD&D Fiend Folio* – £25. *Player's Handbook* – £15. *Gamma World, Boothill* – £10. *RuneQuest* – £20. Robert Hutchings 01202 877645

● *D&D, AD&D 1st & 2nd edition* books, boxes, ADVs, ACCs. Send ssae for lists to DM Whitfield, 13 Winchester Road, Portsmouth, Hants PO2 7PS

● Wanted: TSR *AD&D* modules G1-G3, A1-A4, S1-S3. Good prices. Call Daniel Birchall 01625 574972

● *Ars Magica:* 13 titles for sale + *Indiana Jones* RPG. Prices negotiable. Matthew Wallhead 01572 787674

● Needed! *SLA* expansion books, not *Karma* or *Mort*. Will pay huge amounts. Adam Wycherley 01980 594804

● Wanted: *James Bond* GM pack, *Villains* book and *Assault* game. Grant Erswell 01225 423141

● Wanted: *Space Master* stuff and *Grey Worlds* magazines. Send lists to Darren Paul Hill, 64 Walford Drive, Lincoln LN6 7NT

● Wanted: *Space Master: Armoured Assault*. Paul Bruton on 0121 477 5559 (after 6pm)

● Bargain! *Twilight 2,000 2nd ed* + 11 supps; worth £100+, sell for £30. In excellent condition. Contact Dave Cadman on 01279 452040 for list

CCGs

● Anyone want to trade rare cards for *Mythos* on a card-for-card basis? Also *Wyvern* and *Bloodwars*. Wanted: *AD&D Ravenloft DA1 Adventures in Blackmoor*. Any reasonable offer considered. Hadley Connor 01263 514741

● For sale or trade; all black edged: *Middle-earth, Mythos, X-Files, Star Trek*. Richard Mandeville 01905 756324

● Sell or trade *BattleTech, Netrunner, Proteus, XXXenophile* rares. Mike Wilkinson 01494 670960 (evenings)

Bargain of the Month!

● 1,820 *M:TG* cards, mags, books + lots more. Quick sale at £80 ono. Contact Sam Wade 01527 879921

● *Magic* cards wanted. Send sae for list to David Rivett, 48a Briar Edge, Forest Hall, Newcastle/Tyne NE12 0JN

● *Magic* or *Visions* cards wanted for a good price. Marc Rigler 01794 323891

● *M:TG* – 475 unlimited edition cards. Some *Revised* and *Antiquities* including rare cards. Excellent condition – only £100. Carl Ebanks 0121 556 8574

● 3,000 *Star Wars* CCG with 'A New Hope' and 'Hoth' cards – £300. Waseem Aftab 01865 63280

● Mint Han Solo + 175 *Star Wars* cards – bargain at only £25. Contact David Lodge (1-7pm) 01734 318745

● *X-Files* and *Doctor Who* CCG singles for sale. Walter Mabon 01592 742765

wargames

● Wanted: early *Warhammer 40,000* miniatures 1985-90: astropaths, techies, etc. Simon Webb 01276 855721

● Wanted: any painted *WH* army/*Necromunda* gang. Matthew Metz 0171 235 5909

● Wanted: Tyranids. Will pay: Termagent – 50p, Hormugants – £1, Gargoyles – £1.50. Unpainted or little broken. David Camburn 01843 293945

● Well-painted Tyranid army for sale, including book, Hive Tyrant, Tyranid Warriors, Termagents, Lictor Biovour – £45. Adam Seabridge 01637 871998

● *WHFB* dwarf army, unpainted. 100 models – £50. Dan Tomlinson, 6 School Lane, Roby Mill, Wigan, Lancs WN8 0QR

● *Warhammer* + loads of extras – £70. *Dragon Dice:* 4 kicker packs and *MageStorm* boxed – £25. 01639 882611

● *Warhammer* boxed set and *Chaos* supplements. 8,000 point army + 15 issues of **arcane**, 20 issues of *White Dwarf*. Sensible offers. Alec Richardson 01235 762634

live action

● *Daughter of Twilight* live-action vampire, Aberdeen and Dundee. David Lumsden 0468 723437 (mobile) 01224 722987 (home)

● *Foggie by Night:* Aberdeen's best and most populous vampire game invites neonates and caitiff to the marches of Aberdeen City (cf KGB entry in Clubs listing) `www.mr.whippy.net/KGB/fbn.htm`

Also see the special report in the Aberdeen Herald & Post of Thursday, March 13th.

● Mansfield LARP group. Wanted: people interested in fantasy live roleplay using the Earthworks system. Jake, 8 Sywell Close, Sutton-in-Ashfield, Notts NG17 4NN `Admiral_Niblit@Hotmail.com`

● Gathering players – goblinoid liberation army recruiting. Only oppressed monsters need apply. Everybody welcome. Fun guaranteed! Dave McLoughlin 01476 579866

● Clothe your character. Enhance your entity. Dress to impress with Phantasy Dress. Sharon Windmill (aka Pahantasy) 01322 613554

play-by-mail

● Young PBM player needs five players for simple space PBM game. It's all free. Richard Johnson, 64 Maple Avenue, Heybridge, Essex CM9 4BP

fanzines

● New fanzine: *Hex*. Contains *X-Files*, Stephen King, etc. Only 60p with 40p stamps attached. Chris Edwards, Trefin, Carmarthen Road, Cross-Hands, Llanelli, Dyfed SA14 6TH

other stuff

● Half-price sale of books incl. White Wolf, *GURPS, Rifts, Kult*. All excellent condition. Details on 01603 278273. M Leeder

● Wanted: *Sphinx, Man Myth and Magic, Dragon Warriors Book 3*. All mid-1980s releases. Paul Elliott 01227 785841

● Wanted: *Tales of the Arabian Nights* board game. Richard Mandeville 01905 756324

● Wanted: SSI RPGs for the Amiga – *Pools of Radiance*, etc. Cash waiting. John Shimell 01243 806737

John, meet Stuart.

● Amiga computer games for sale. All original; many adventures, RPGs and wargames. Printed lists available. Stuart Hardy 01909 771528

Looks like you might sell all that Amiga stuff after all, Stuart.

contacts

● Help! Party missing. Need back-up. Play anything. House rules. 18+, beginners welcome. Chris Lord 0161 797 8815

● Public domain sci-fi RPG in development. Would appreciate ideas, contributions, etc. Contact Rob Alexander, 14 Leighton Road, Penn, Wolverhampton

● Lincoln: someone prove to me that RPG life exists. New players (20+) wanted for fantasy, sci-fi and horror games. Call Neil Blumfield 01522 686515

● Sheffield: roleplayers needed! White Wolf, *Stormbringer, Darkside*, etc. Humour essential. All welcome; m/f, 18-80+, new players. Joanne Smith, Flat 2, 105 Burngreave Road, Pitsmoor, Sheffield S3 9DF

● Wirral: novice/experienced players wanted to join two players (29 & 30+). Light-hearted, easy going, daft as a box of frogs. Will play almost anything, especially if it involves BIG GUNS. Steve Irvine 0151 327 2941 (evenings)

Please place my free ad under the following heading:

- ☐ roleplaying games
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- ☐ play-by-mail
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- ☐ messages
- ☐ clubs & societies

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● Rare breed of *M:TG* player (female) seeks group(s) in the Harlow area. Kelly Paine 01279 302467 (evenings)

● Anyone want to help start a CCG club in the Beaconsfield area? Also *BattleTech* and *Netrunner* players wanted to form league in the Bucks/Berks area. Contact Mike Wilkinson 01494 670960

● *Cyberpunk/Netrunner* ref/player seeks campaign players in the Brighton area. Interested in *Shadowrun* too. Dave Williams 01273 551810

● *Cthulhu* players wanted for 1920s campaign beginning with *Masks of Nyarlathotep*. M/F welcome. Pref 18+. London or South areas. Experienced GM just arrived from Australia. E-mail Nick at ncrones@hotmail.com

Nick obviously intends to be here for some time.

● *ME:TW* player seeks other players in the Hinckley, Leics area. Paul 01455 890158

● Any roleplayers or wargamers in the Wick area? Scott Sutherland 01955 603934

● Experienced RPG player looking for clubs/groups in the West London area. Paul Booby 0966 157791

● Bored gamer will play anything with any group in the Bristol area. Weekends only. Can run *Star Wars* games. AC Britten E8430312, TTS (4T), Elim15, RAF Locking, Weston-Super-Mare, Somerset BS24 7AA

Someone in the RAF who runs Star Wars *games? Let's just hope he's not into LARP.*

● Gufois: UFO contact and paranormal club. Imran Hameed, 164 Dudley Rd, East Oldbury, Warley, West Midlands B69 3DS

It wasn't a spaceship, Imran; it was AC Britten.

messages

● Gathering! Clan McEwan seek contestants in the great drinking contest

● Ben Mortimer: hurry up and run *Changeling*

● George Bailey: we are watching, we are waiting. Soon you will know – ex ungue leonem

USS Bozeman

● For sale: 50,000+ tonnes assorted starship-quality alloys and components. Several careless owners (mostly humans). All offers to Tribble High Command, c/o ISV Vengence

Humans, eh? Messy little creatures, aren't they?

● USS Bozeman: Initiating emergency transporters. Medics on stand-by. USS Legless.

● This is the Illuminati ship 'American Gothic'. Activating the Plot Hole Generator and teleporting Captain Bateson and his crew to my Brig. Don't try to escape Bateson, or I'll drop you back with the proto-snotlings. Tactical, on my mark, raise shields, arm weapons and blast the USS Hero out of existence. Then order me a tribbleburger

Not the Plot Hole Generator, man! That's crazy talk! You're going to get us all killed!

● Q materialises on the bridge, pauses to watch a snotling race by: "Anyone for Brokian Ultra-Kriket? Those things could pass for balls with a little tinkering." (High-pitched scream) *Q is alone. Bateson and his crew are now captives of the American Gothic and there's nobody but proto-snotlings left aboard the Bozeman. It is the Marie Celeste of Sector 999.*

roleplaying clubs and societies

Tell us about your club – where, when and what you play – and we'll tell the world.

● **Barnsley TCG & Roleplaying Games Club** Tuesday evenings 6-10.30pm. "Still going strong. New members welcome." Barnsley Methodist Church, Pitt Street, Barnsley, S. Yorks *01226 205595*

● **Bath Roleplaying Club** Sundays, 11.30-5pm. "No fees. Needs new players (18+)." *Neal 01225 463631*

● **Battlezone**, Fridays, 5pm, 58 Boutport Street, Barnstaple, Devon. *Pete Ashman 01271 321344*

● **Black Country Roleplaying Society** Thursdays, 7.30pm. Blackheath Coronation Social Club, Park Street, Rowley Regis, West Midlands. "All ages and games – 70p a night." *Steve Turner 01384 235244*

● Formerly **Bournemouth Beserkers** Fridays, 7-9pm, 32 Ellingham Avenue, March, Cambs. "Got *Planescape* for Christmas and need keen players." *Chris or Debbie 01354 657713*

● **Bradford Games Club** Sundays, 11.30am-6.30pm, Gingerbread Centre, Darley Street, Bradford Centre. "All Workshop games, some others. £1 for room rent."

● **Brighton** "Any system. Playing *D&D* at the moment." And *Conspiracy X*. *Ric 01273 683400*

● **Bristol LRP Society** Monthly fantasy LRPs out and indoors, rich gameworld, comprehensive rules. Also *Renewal, Gathering* etc. Meet Friday 8pm at the back room of the Assize Courts pub, Bristol. "Old timers and virgins welcome." *Ciaran 0117 974 1863 Andy 0117 970 6651 Dave the Hobbit 0117 907 9195*

● **Bromsgrove Roleplayers** Wednesdays 7-10pm. The Burcot Room, The Council House, Burcot Lane, Bromsgrove. *Pete 01905 354717 Dave 01527 875789*

● **Covenant of Salop** Saturday 10.30am-4pm, St Peter's Parish Hall, Ludlow, Shropshire. *Gareth 01584 872980*

● **Croxley Roleplayers** "Meet most Sundays at my home. Play cyberpunk and sci-fi genres mostly." *Mr NI Clubb 01923 778379*

● **Croydon Roll & Play** The Dog & Bull, Surrey Street Market, Croydon. Thursdays 7pm+ *Dave 0181 660 3032*

● **Doncaster Wargamers & Roleplayers Club**. Wednesdays 1900-2130, Elmfield House, South Parade, Doncaster. "RPGs, CCGs, CDGs, boardgames, miniatures. Historical, fantasy, sci-fi, Games Workshop. Under 16s – £1, over 16s – £2." *01302 881346*

● **Dragons on the Hill** Wednesday 6-11pm. (18+) King of Diamonds, Leather Lane, EC1. *Mark Shorey 0181 560 3160*

● **East Kilbride Games Club** "Speak fish man!" *John 01355 260601*

● **East Midlands RPGA/Harlequins Games Club** Sundays, 1.45-6pm. 2nd Arnold (St Mary's) Scout HQ, Atherley House, Calverton Road, Arnold, Nottingham. *Simon Stoppard 0115 921 5533 John Harris 0115 939 4185* sara@theleys.demon.co.uk

● **Elemental Lords** every three weeks, Worcester. *Paul Baker 01905 428386* d.foxall-reilly@worc.ac.uk

● **Finchley Games Club** Thursdays, 6.30-10.30pm. Old Finchleians Sports Club, Woodside Park. *Seren 0181 202 3856*

● **Glasgow South** *AD&D* club starting. Limited places. Write for more info to Martyn Smith, 58 Nithsdale Street, Strathbungo, Glasgow G41 2PY *Martyn 0141 423 3289*

● **Glasgow University Gaming Society** Tuesdays (term time only), 5.30-9pm. Qudos – Queen Margaret Union, University Gardens. All welcome. *0141 337 6768* thomja@sdcs.gla.ac.uk http://www.gla.ac.uk/Clubs/Gaming/

● **Grimsby Wargamers Club** for all wargames, boardgames and cardgames (no FRPs). 14+ only, Mondays and Thursdays. *Tim Walker 01472 348953*

● **Guild of Mêlée and Magic** Various days and venues. First visit free with a copy of **arcane**, annual membership £5. Central (Mondays RPGs, Tuesdays CCGs) *Jason 0181 715 8675, The George, 213 Strand WC2;* West (Saturdays – RPGs/CCGs) – *Gerald 0181 991 1297;* East (Thursdays – RPGs/CCGs) – *Mel 0181 595 3467;* South (Sundays – RPGs/CCGs) – *Jon 0181 699 9654*

● **Islington** weekends. *M:TG*, roleplaying, GW boardgames. *Simon 0171 226 7724*

● **KGB** The Robert Gordon Universtity RPG, LRP, CCG & wargames club. Every day of the week except Fridays. "All games covered, extensive games library. Vampire Live every 2nd Saturday." Robert Gordon University Students' Union *Nathan 01224 584590, Union 01224 262262.* E-mail mr.whippy@rsc.co.uk Web site: www.mr-whippy.net/KGB

● **Liverpool WGA** Thursdays, 5.30-9pm, Sat and Sun 2-7pm, 43 Renshaw Street, Liverpool. "All ages welcome. RPGs also." *Jim 0151 428 1076*

● **Manticore Games Club** Thursday, 7.30pm. Old Bell, Hemel Hempstead. Cards, boardgames, RPGs. *Steve 0181 903 5446*

● **Minotaur's Head Roleplay Society** North London. RPGs, CCGs, wargames, freeform. *Steve 0181 482 5568*

● **Omega** 2nd and 4th Sundays, 10-5pm. 18+. "Seeking experienced roleplayers." *Paul 0161 344 1066* knight.errant@dial.pipex.com http://dspace.dial.pipex.com/town/plaza/ran54/omega.htm

● **Pembrokeshire Games Club** Wednesday, 6-9pm. Community Education Centre, Haverfordwest. *Magic, AD&D, Vampire, Necromunda. Adam 01437 762633*

● **Redcar Adventurers Roleplaying Games Club** Friday, 6-9pm. Redcar Library. *John 01287 642523*

● **Renegade Roleplaying Club** in Ilford will be starting again soon at the Havelock. *Mark or Allison 0181 514 8189* (7pm+)

● **Ring of Mages** *M:TG* club. *Jamie 01888 544880*

● **Roleplayers of Chester** Wednesdays, 7.30pm-late. Chester Rail Club, Hoole. *Greg 01606 883698 Allison 0151 200 6945*

● **Rugby Players' Guild** Monday, 7.30-11pm. Players and GMs (18+) welcome. *Bill 01788 334165 Keary 01788 334941*

● **SASRA RP&WGC** Thursdays, 7.30pm, Summergrove Hotel, Hensingham. "Wide range of RPGs, LRPs and CCGs." *John 01946 590114 Ray 01946 861204*

● **Shattered Reality Roleplay Club** "Looking for new members and GMs." Hallglen, Falkirk. *Andrew McVicar 01324 714214*

● **Spartan Circle Club** Sunday, 6.30-10.30pm. St Laurence's Centre, Northfield, Birmingham. *Paul Rickards 0121 415 4722*

● **Stamford Adventure Society** Monday and Wednesday 8-11pm, RAF association, St Pauls Street, Stamford, Lincs. Roleplay and wargames. Players and GMs 16+.

● **Stockport Goblin Horde RP Club** Wednesdays, 7pm. *AD&D, WFRP, Shadowrun*, etc. *Rachel 0161 456 1444*

● **The AARRGH! Thunk! Roleplaying Group, Bedford** requires more loonies. 18+. *WoD* and other strangeness/malarkey. *Woody 01234 341125*

● **The Albion Guard Games Club** Mondays and Tuesdays. The Plough, Dog's Head Street, Ipswich. *Keith 01473 289560*

● **The Orc's Armpit** Second Wednesday every month. Hobson's Choice, Banbury. *Magic, Trek* CCGs. *Earthdawn, Warhammer* RPGs.

● **Wandsworth RPG** Mondays, 7.30pm. 57a Heathfield Road, Wandsworth. *Dave 0171 738 1807*

● **West London Card Games** Weds. The Castle, Acton. *Magic, Star Wars*, etc. *John 0171 573 1753* (days) *0181 993 4439* (eves)

● **Windsor RPG Club** Tuesdays, 7.30-11pm, The Three Elms, junction of Clarence Road and Hatch Lane, Windsor. Over 18s only. We play anything. Games rotate on 6-8 week cycle. *Andy 01753 573394* (evenings)

● **Worlds Apart Roleplayers** Tuesdays 6.30-11pm, Wartling Road Hall, Eastbourne. *Geoff 01323 646907*

Gnome World
DAI HARD
A TALE OF GNOME WORLD PART FIVE
WRITERS: DAN ABNETT AND ANDY LANNING
ARTIST ANDREW CURRIE
ER, BOSS? I THINK YOU'RE GONNA WANT TO SEE THIS
I JUST OPENED THE FINAL LOCK
FIND ME THAT BLOODY HOBBIT AND BRING ME HIS HEAD BEFORE HE TOTALLY SCREWS OUR PLAN!
A DRAGON! WE'RE GOING TO NEED A BIGGER SPELL BOOK!
DON'T WORRY! LEAVE THIS TO MY FRIENDS AT THE F.B.I...
MEANWHILE, OUTSIDE...
OKAY, OFFICER... WE'LL HANDLE THE SIEGE FROM HERE. WE'RE FROM THE FEDERAL BRIGADE OF INCANTATIONS
WHAT'RE YOU FEDS GONNA DO, THEN?
WE NEED TO DISARM THE ELF TERRORISTS HOLDING LORD DELORIEN'S CASTLE...
...SO WE'RE GOING TO CAST A SPECIAL SPELL TO NEGATE ALL MAGIC INSIDE THE CASTLE ITSELF!
INSIDE
THERE! JUST LIKE I PROMISED. THE DRAGON'S BEEN TURNED TO STONE
STANDARD FBI PRACTISE IS TO NEGATE ALL MAGIC. THEY DID THE HARD WORK FOR US
NOW GRAB THE LOOT! THERE'S NOTHING GOING TO STOP US NOW!
DON'T BET ON THAT, BOYO...
DAI SCREAMING

free offer
QUEST
Rules, set-up and first turn
FREE
WORTH £5.00
Rules, set-up and first 3 turns
FREE
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MONSTER ISLAND
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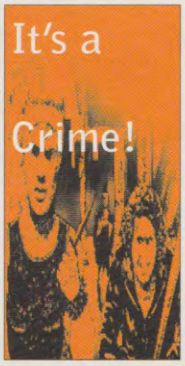

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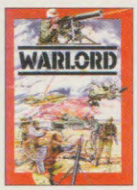

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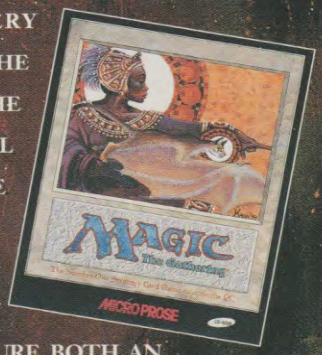

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